BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE BLUE VEIL" &c

# THE CONDEMNED DOOR

BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY

Fortuné Du Boisgobey was a popular French sensational novelist, whose works were extensively read in this country. He was born at Granville in Normandy in 1824, and died in 1891.

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## (*PORTE CLOSE*)

OR

## The Secret of Trigavou Castle

BY

## FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY

AUTHOR OF "THE BLUE VEIL," "CRY OF BLOOD," &c.,&c.

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# THE CONDEMNED DOOR

## Or, The Secret of Trigavou Castle

## VOLUME ONE

## CHAPTER I

### AWAITING HER CHOSEN

One November evening, last year, the Baroness of Houlbecq was brooding all alone in her delightful snuggery in the first story of the left wing of Trigavou Castle, her country seat in Brittany. Her husband, General Baron Houlbecq, had gone away hunting at dawn, in woods thirty mile distant.

The night was black and the wind blew like blasts of thunder, coming in booming gusts which burst heavy rain clouds at varied intervals. The showers lashed the window panes and made the huge old trees groan again. Altogether it was a time when the nor'-wester hinted that good folk ought to keep close to their own fireside.

The Baroness Flavia was in a reverie before the old-fashioned fire-place, where large oak logs blazed, having tossed aside a book upon a Chinese lacquered table.

Her situation required profound reflection, for it seemed about turning to tragedy, the blackest and most guilty perhaps.

Trigavou Castle was a large, rambling structure, half a hundred years old, tacked on a tower, remnant of a glorious stronghold, besieged thrice by the English ; this tower had been maintained by the last proprietor of the old line under the terms of sale, to bear witness to the antiquity of his race. This heir had been ruined by unlucky speculations, so that all he had left to his only son, Alain of Trigavou, was less than a thousand francs a-year.

After the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, land and house were bought by General Houlbecq, who spent the mid-half year here with the wife he espoused after leaving the army. He led a hearty life shooting, hunting and feasting all the neighbouring squires. There was no ball-giving, as he received none but men, though my lady did not show that time hung heavy on her hands. With perfect cordiality she presided at these "stag-parties," where the cream of society presented itself in shooting-coats and wading-boots. She so gratified the farmers that they overlooked the "town lady," as they called her, putting on airs of elegance, and were lost in admiration of her straightforwardness in greeting.

Lady Flavia was a town lady, indeed, and a high born dame to boot, for her father was the Marquis of Bourbriac, but he had died like the last of the Trigavous, leaving his two daughters never a penny piece. The sisters were alike only in that respect, for Flavia was a very handsome, tall brunette, resembling her mother, a Cuban whom the marquis had married out of love; whilst Viviana, with the pet name of Vivette, was a blonde, sweet and gentle, with no such fiery eyes, brilliant colour or quick wit as Flavia. Their aunt, who had brought up the orphans, set Vivette down as a "silly," but she was wrong, for Vivette had sound sense, keen wisdom and true goodness. She did not dazzle, but bewitched.

Flavia's marriage lifted the Bourbriacs out of genteel poverty. She was twenty-five when General Houlbecq (second baron, his father having been ennobled when colonel under Napoleon I.) was violently smitten at a ball given by Marshal MacMahon at the Elysée Palace. The general was over fifty, though he did not look his age, and passed for a handsome soldier. Corpulence had not spoilt his burly figure; his face was martial, and that never displeases women; and out of his twenty thousand dollars of income he endowered the Bourbriac beauty with munificent pin-money.

In three weeks married and installed in the baron's mansion, Friedland Avenue, Paris, the new couple went for the summer to Trigavou House, and by 1885 they had kept up this course without any accident.

Flavia remained childless, so there was nobody else in the house save Vivette, who would not wed, though her brother-in-law was ready to "pay expenses and to boot."

The baron and his wife dwelt in perfect accord, though unlike in tastes and temper. She liked fashion, he hated it. She was coquettish; he simple, wild, even rather rough, like the older type of soldiers. But still no serious rupture had occurred. In Paris, my lady was never maligned, and down in the country her behaviour was irreproachable. The gossips hinted that the devil's own always carried on their games under the mask: but there were no grounds for such slurs, as the guests were not of the kind to captivate a beauty who had turned the cold shoulder on notorious lady-killers. Besides, the general played the sentinel well. He had aged considerably under marriage, the usual penalty on late comers to the Temple of Hymen; it drives them grey to watch a treasure they cannot enjoy.

As their years accumulate, their jealousy augments.

He tried to hide it, but his wife knew what was in the air, and guided herself accordingly. Hence she deprived herself of the only company likely to tease her lord and master, Alain of Trigavou.

All he had preserved of his birthright was a farmer's house, where he spent most of the year. He was a captivating fellow, and the lovely Flavia had met him in town houses of high degree wherein his good old name passed him in spite of the slender purse. When the Houlbecqs came down for the summer, Alain would call, and the general would return his visit in twenty-four hours, and there ceased their relations, though the Hunaudaie Farm was not a long walk from Trigavou. Not being a sportsman, Alain never met the baron and his hard-riding crew in the woods, and so lived on in complete loneliness, till many wondered whence he derived the courage to be the hermit up to Christmas in the bleakest northern country.

Probably the general never had this question strike him. Flavia alone might have answered it, and if her mate had been less out of doors, he might have guessed a letter or two of the key-word. But, though he never thought of it, everything comes to a solution in this inquisitive world.

Flavia was listening in her boudoir, but not to the branches tearing one another in the gale; it seemed as if she were expecting somebody, and yet her husband was not to return till after the morrow. It was St. Hubert's Day, the patron saint of the chase, and sportsmen will have the day to themselves. They drink deep to their patron wherever they are in the woods or hunting lodges, and willingly forget all about their lonely spouses at home. Lady Houlbecq knew such habits thoroughly and reckoned for some fifty hours of solitude, for the baron on this annual solemnity took along his man coachman and one of the two gamekeepers. The other one would be the sole guard for the women, and these were all abed early by her ladyship's orders, a command from which the promulgator excused herself, of course.

The old Saxony china clock denoted midnight, and yet my lady had no inclination for repose. She had dined with her sister, who, not being well at the storm coming on, had sought her couch betimes.

Softened by a shade the lamp-light feebly illumined the room, hung with old tapestry left with the pictures at the sale; in one wall it marked a doorway to the old tower, which nobody entered or thought of entering. With her head leaned back Lady Flavia was looking at the woven figures without seeing them, when a smart tap at the casement made her start up with one leap towards the window, which she opened briskly. A man in a hooded waterproof ulster climbed over the crossbar and stepped down into the room.

"At last you're with me!" ejaculated Flavia, clasping him in her arms. "I had ceased to hope for you to-night."

"I am only a little behindhand, that's all! The Hunaudaie is not next door, and this beastly weather has made ditches of the roads."

"I know that, but I got impatient awaiting you. Besides, I have a bad feeling on me this night—a kind of evil foreboding. Throw off that coat, and let me have a look at you, Alain, my darling."

"There's plenty of time for love, my darling. Let's get the window closed first."

## CHAPTER II

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH FALLS ACROSS GUILTY JOYS

The closing of the window was a wise precaution, for the draught had all but put the lamp out, but the revived fire sent out enough beams from the chimney-place to enable Flavia to contemplate her lover's features when he had uncloaked himself. He was a downright handsome fellow, tall, fair, perhaps a little pale, slender yet strong, with large blue eyes, and long silken moustache, which ended in a curl, like hooks to catch female hearts. At all events, Lady Houlbecq's was caught thereby. For Alain of Trigavou, hers was one of those stormy passions which drive a woman of thirty odd into all manner of extravagances. He loved her in a less exalted way, though he did not hesitate to risk his life by scaling the castle wall—when the husband was away. The coolness he opposed to the woman's transports only whetted her amorous fever.

"How splendid you are!" murmured she, hanging round his neck to admire and caress him.

He extricated himself gently, and drew her towards the fireside with the rather unromantic intention to dry and warm himself. She let him lead her, but forced him to take the armchair she had vacated, and she knelt before him, clasping her hands and looking him in the eyes.

"Two whole nights to ourselves," she exclaimed in ecstasy. "For you'll come again to-morrow, won't you?"

"Two, if he does not return in the morning," answered Alain, smiling. "But if this rain keeps on it will put a stop to hunting."

"He'll not come home, I tell you. If there's no hunting, he'll lay by over at Lanvollon, feasting with his hard-drinking mates. They can drink right on for forty-eight hours!"

"Your oracle is less reliable than the barometer, which points to storm. But if he comes I shall have timely warning, as I have a spy below—my old farmer of the Hunaudaie. He hates him, and he chums in with the servants here and there. Deuce take me if I long to have your Bluebeard catch me here."

"You are too prudent," said the lady of the castle with a gloomy brow. "Anybody would think you were afraid of him."

"So I am—for your dear sake, my pet. He is one of those men who would shoot you off-hand if he barely suspected you."

"He'll have no doubts. He was jealous, but I lived that out in seven years, while he studied me and eyed me ceaselessly. Now, he believes he fully understands me, and he is convinced that all danger is over. He theorizes upon women as upon the horse. He fancies that at my age I ought to be calm, and that, had I intended to deceive him, I would have tried it long ago. Oh, what it has cost me to sacrifice my youth to this unloved trooper, whom I execrate now as much as I adore you! But at least I can profit by the leisure left me which I have won so hard. I can see you, and talk lovingly with you—though none too often, alas! And when you cannot steal in, I can never meet you anywhere! I am jealous, too, and fancy oft-times that you are not always alone——"

"Down here?" cried the last of the Trigavous, gaily. "Rather hard to find a flame in this cheerless quarter! You know well that I am quite a hermit, and you ought to be kind to me."

"Don't you believe I am grateful for your giving up society in these long months of exile from the capital! I can never love you enough to repay all you do for me. But I feel that a day will come for your wearying of a life more cruel to bear than the woes of lovers parted by insurmountable hindrances. Even I question if I shall have the bravery to stand such alternatives of mad delight and black despair."

"But we are doomed to it, for I see no way to end it."

"What prevents our flight together?"

Alain made a wry face which left no doubt as to his opinion of the consequences of such a step.

"My dear Flavia, give up so absurd a notion," he said gravely. "Were I to consent in your ruin that way, you would not be slow to bitterly regret my spoiling your existence

"Why don't you own that you regret the burden of a woman? Oh, you never loved me as I do you!"

"I love you quite as much, but not in the same way."

"Ay, you reason; you take the opinion of dolts and the commonplace, and not to run counter to it, I must continue this seldom seeing you, and drag lifelong this crushing shameful chain."

"Not all your life, darling. This mate of yours will surely pass away before you, and then you are a widow."

"You'll make me your wife?" interrupted the baroness, looking at her lover straight in the whites of the eyes.

"Why should I not?" answered Trigavou, evasively. "At the same time, I do not see so much gain in that—or much desirable in the part of a Benedict. I am not used to it, you see."

"Our gain will be in our freedom—our happiness—our wealth——"

"I don't dispute the freedom or the bliss, but wealth is a very different matter. I am not wealthy, or you either."

"Stop! I have read my husband's will at the solicitor's, leaving me all his fortune, save an unimportant legacy to my sister."

"I was not aware of that," muttered the other.

It was a little strange that Vivette should not be remembered handsomely. The two sisters did not lead the same country life. The elder took no concern in the household, whilst the other, rising with the lark, attended to all the minutiæ of the grand establishment. The general relied on her even overseeing the stable, for she knew all about horses, and liked them. Moreover he had instituted her his almoner, and she did all the visiting of the poor, distributing coin, food, and the clothing of her own making. When the local doctor could not come she looked to the sick, and had set up a dispensary in the castle. Vivette had a talent for charitable work, and was so pleased to exercise it that she never demurred at trudging through muddy roads to the wretched hovels, whilst her sister mooned away her leisure.

Trigavou's silence after her confidence surprised my lady not a little.

"However, it little troubles me who gets the money," said he finally, with a happy-go-lucky air. "I am not after your fortune, and since I possess your affection nothing in the future worries me. Let us enjoy the fleeting hour and talk of other things than delusions. My Flavia is in a deucedly logical humour to-night, quite novel to me. You have hardly more than kissed me, and any outsider would fancy you were seeking a quarrel with me."

"I?" exclaimed the false wife, drawing the speaker to her till their lips met. "You do not understand me, and you never will! I would never differ from you if I were not so fond. You are my all in this world, and I must have you mine, body and soul, as I am your own! Were I to lose you, I should not outlive you; and whenever I think how you risk your dear life to see me—"

"Pooh, risk, nothing!" replied Trigavou, smiling. "Even granting your husband came back suddenly, it would not be the suddenness of a bombshell. We should hear him coming in time for me to climb down into the grounds by the same road that brought me here."

"A road where one false step would precipitate you to your death! We are twenty feet above the ground here."

"I daresay, but the ivy ladder is strong and the natural rungs are as familiar as the steps of my town chambers. Why, I made them myself, child that you are, when I was a boy, rook hunting in the old tower top. I know every nook and cranny in the tower, which Duguesclin defended of yore, and there's no danger of my falling there."

"There is a danger somewhere, then, you own?"

"But nothing much! Still, at my last coming, I was a bit behind-hand, and just as I was getting over the wall, or, rather, through the breach—you know—dawn was peeping. I darted rapidly home, but behind a hedge, a hundred paces off, I espied one of your keepers, a strapping chap, who always looks hard at me whenever we meet on the road. What was he after? Some vermin, or me? Had he seen me scramble over the wall? But you may be sure, I never lingered to ask him. I cut across the fields and he did not follow me. But it's an awkward incident, and it makes me uneasy about the consequences."

"Why did you never tell me before? That keeper is Pierre Calorguen—my husband's shadow; he was in his regiment and would let himself be chopped to mincemeat for him. We are ruined if he recognised you."

"Ruined is a strong word. We need only take more care. At the very worst, we will have to meet at the decayed summer-house at the far end of the grounds. You can give me the key of that little gate in the wall. It will not be so comfortable as your rooms, but that man will not be so 'cute as to hunt us up there. Anyway, I little fear he will acquaint his master—the general is one of those who would ill-receive such a complaint from a servant."

"You do not know what Calorguen is; I have not told you everything. In the first place, he is in love with me—"

"Nonsense! You do not mean to say that he has offered you his humble suit?"

"No; but I read it in his eyes—speaking eyes, his! Women understand that dumb language, and I am sure I am not wrong. The fellow loves me."

"The deuce! The tangle is more complicated now. This sort of scamp is likely to drop the baron an anonymous letter. I must be on my guard, and in fact, I shall——"

"Hist!" interrupted her ladyship, laying a finger on the speaker's lips.

"What?" asked he, preparing to spring up.

"Something I hear—like carriage wheels; and I fancy I heard the gate closed."

A bell rang, and its clang was brought clear and distinct by the rising wind.

"'Tis my husband!" exclaimed the baroness.

"There is still time to get away clean by the window," observed Trigavou, without showing too much emotion.

"No! Calorguen will shoot you! I am sure he has betrayed you. Knowing where you cross the wall, he'll waylay you there. He will maintain that he thought he was shooting a burglar."

"And if I linger the general will kill me! However, I would rather wait for him, for—if his wrath is vented upon you, I'll use my revolver."

The pair were both afoot now, facing the danger.

"Come," she suddenly ejaculated, pushing him towards the hangings, "we are safe! This covers the inlet to a hiding place in the old tower."

"So it does, and well I know it! When I was a naughty boy, my father used to black-hole me in it. Capital suggestion yours—especially as I know besides——"

"Come, come, I tell you!"

The tapestry was not nailed up and down, and hence the lady could draw it aside from covering a worm-eaten door. This panel had no lock, only a rusty latch which was easily lifted. A current of damp air came out upon her cheek and made her recoil as if from a charnel-house. But her lover stepped in boldly enough and gave her a farewell kiss, saying—

"Mind, have no fear, my precious! Just forget where I am and brazen it out with the jealous Turk. I promise you we shall soon be together again."

He disappeared into the gloom. The panel closed behind him, and the faithless spouse, letting the curtains fall, stood forth a little and listened.

The stair without creaked under a heavy martial step she knew but too well. There was not a spare moment to call up a face for the occasion. But, in great conjugal crises, the imminence of peril gives guilty women coolness and presence of mind. Flavia dropped into the armchair which her lover had occupied, took upon her lap the novel cast down when Trigavou tapped at the window, placed her feet on the fender and closed her eyes as if napping.

It was high time, for the general stamped in without knocking.

To the terrified wife's ear, her husband's step sounded like the footfall of avenging fate !

## CHAPTER III

### KEEPING GUARD OVER THE DEATH TRAP

The baroness had not thought of relighting the lamp; the fire had not been replenished for a time, and flickered feebly, and the intruder had come up without a light. He stopped on the threshold, surprised to see it so dark.

"Are you there, Flavia?" he challenged, but not in a very high voice.

She took heed not to answer, and would have been only too delighted if sleep might have shielded her, but he saw better now he was accustomed to the twilight. He came over to the mantelshelf, took down a candlestick and applied a brand from the hearth, and waved the candle so near her face that she was forced to open her eyes.

"Eh, is that you, dear?" she murmured, stretching like a cat, or a woman aroused.

"Yes, I," returned the general crossly. "I was not expected."

"Certainly not, since you sent word this morning that you would spend a couple of days over at Commander Jagon's, his coursing is so good."

"I did intend to, but there's no hunting this weather. It comes down in a torrent, and it promises to keep on to-morrow. After dinner I had the dogcart out and drove home."

Still standing, the speaker turned his back on the fire, and balefully eyed his wife, who made no move to rise. This man of sixty was an upright and robust giant, like an oak. From his short, thick moustache, curved round the corner of his mouth, and his stern eye under a heavy brow, he resembled Bismarck. On this night, contrary to his rule, he had not changed his out-door dress to visit his wife in her boudoir. He wore boots up to his thighs, a driving waterproof and a Canadian otter skin cap pointed like a Prussian helmet. This rough costume did not soften his aspect, and his wild charge in promised nothing pleasant. The baroness reasoned that he would not have rung at the gate so loudly if he had meant to take her by surprise, but in spite of all her self-encouragement, she remained alarmed.

"I thought you would have retired. You are not usually up so late," observed M. du Houlbecq.

"That's so, but I was reading and nodded off," faltered the lady. "Better I should be at rest; I am ready to drop of weariness."

"Still, you won't mind my taking the chill off at your fire. Five leagues in an open cart in the freezing wind and rain—I tell you, I am an icicle."

"Do as you like, dear, of course."

The general sat astride of a chair, and made up the fire with the tongs. Ugly weapon! His wife shuddered—not with cold.

"Reading, eh?" he said, taking up the book fallen at the foot of her chair. "Some love story, I'll be bound."

"A novel by Balzac."

"I guessed so. You never did care for sensible writing."

"You do not want me to read the history of the late war, do you?" she retorted, forcing a smile.

"I would rather you made no jests at me. I am not the stupid old war horse you take me for, and I have never imposed on you any military notions. But I do assert that novels are the bane of women."

He had opened the volume and now gave the title a glance, "'La Grand Bretêche; or, Sealed Up,'—what's sealed up? I dare say some secret which prevents an honourable man punishing his wanton mate."

"You are altogether out of it, my dear. It is the story of a husband who takes a glut of vengeance," answered Lady du Holbecq, sharply.

She almost immediately repented having said so much and so sharply, for Balzac's most tragic short story turned on a situation quite akin to this, in which her guilt had precipitated her lover. But she reassured herself with the reflection that the general had not read it, and probably never would. In fact he had forgotten all about it already.

"Are you quite by yourself here?" he inquired carelessly, as he toasted his boots.

"As you see," answered the lady, with an effort. "Vivette usually sits up till ten or so, but she turned tired to-night and went to her own apartments after dinner. So I am standing in need of rest."

"Nobody prevents your taking it. You don't think your husband in the way, do you? I am not going to my own room, where there will not be the ghost of a fire, and where it will be as cold as the buried end of the North Pole. Don't mind me, my love."

There was no answer. The baroness could no longer doubt that she was suspected, and her terrified thoughts asked if he meant to stand sentinel over this keyless door of the hiding place where Alain Trigavou was ensconced. The silence of the general, too, was more fearsome than his questions.

"Did you take a stroll in the grounds?" he suddenly inquired.

"In the wet? Certainly not. Why so strange a question?'

"Only because the wet is tracked all over the carpet."

True enough, Trigavou's boots had left very visible muddy marks of his nocturnal tramp in miry roads, and the drip of his coat had spattered even to the armchair.

"It may have been Rose, my maid," stammered the hapless lady.

"You had better give her a 'carpeting' to-morrow," returned the old soldier, ironically, "for spoiling a fine Gobelins carpet."

Again fell that stern silence, which the confused wife did not attempt to break. She felt that she was lost, and had not enough courage to seek about for means to escape. It was as much as she dared to do to raise her eyes for a peep at the hard face of her inflexible partner, who was no doubt meditatating vengeance. What kind? She could not recall his mention of the secret nook in the great tower, but she could not suppose he was unaware of it. If, then, he knew about it, he must infallibly guess where the lover had taken refuge. Yet, for the time being, he appeared to heed it not. After a quarter hour's perfect stillness he rose abruptly, went straight to the window by which Trigavou had come in, opened it and bent out to have a look round below.

The bystander's idea was that he had set Calorguen to watch at the base of the building and wanted to make sure he was on duty. Houlbecq slammed the window to, and began striding the room.

"Why are you not a-bed?" he suddenly asked.

"Waiting for your departure."

"Too long a wait, then. I don't feel like sleep, and you do look upset. Pray do not mind me; I shall sit up by you and keep the fire going."

She saw that she had better yield, so she compromised by lying down dressed under the canopy of the huge four-poster in a recess over against the tapestry masking the ingress to the hiding-place.

"I shall not disturb you, love," he went on, "with my bivouac."

So saying, he settled down snugly in the armchair which the baroness had vacated and made no stir. The other, as may readily be imagined, was not disposed to sleep. She studied the enigma in its full horror and painfully puzzled out how it might end.

She did not doubt that her heroic Alain would perish of cold and hunger rather than expose her by his revelation to the fury of a most violent husband. She believed that her husband must have acted as he had if his intention had been to drive her lover into that stone trap. Hence, his plan was to blockade the prison till he was forced to come forth. But she hoped that the siege could not be so vigorous that

Trigavou's flight might not be in some brief interval facilitated.

But the means? She knew of none, but she was bound to contrive one.

If her husband persisted in staying there till next day, at least he would hardly prevent Vivette coming in, and two sisters can do anything in concert against a man. The general's decoying away, if only for ten minutes, would suffice for the last of the Trigavous to slip round by some back stairs, or even mount on to the roof, knowing the whole building as he did.

It was necessary to admit the guileless Vivette into the secret of a wicked passion and tarnish her purity of soul; but the elder sister had no scruples now, and she only longed to see the girl come in as usual to kiss her good-morning.

The whole night passed without the general's wife closing an eye, and without his changing posture, save to renew the fire. Day coming late in November, found him deep in the arm-chair, much like a sentry in his watch-box.

The baroness had not lost sight of him, and she had never ceased to listen, but no sound whatever from the tower had struck her attentive ear, and the general had not once even looked at that side.

Coming on eight o'clock, he finally rose, approached the bed, and with cold courtesy asked his beloved how she found herself.

"Oh, very well," she rejoined, half encouraged. "Your queer whim has made me go off all dressed. I do not bear you any grudge, and shall even be obliged to you if you will let me attend to my toilet."

"Most willingly, dear! I want to attend to mine, too, and I hasten to send your woman to you."

A gleam of joy brightened the baroness's eyes, and colour came anew to cheeks pale with anxiety and want of sleep. She thought herself a fool to have alarmed herself.

"He was only in one of his disagreeable tempers, but he suspected nothing," she mused.

"If I have been an annoyance to you I have been punished," he went on. "I am quite stiff and dreadfully chill with your draughty places. I must see to this, for you will be laid up if we are not careful."

He was leaving the room when Vivette bounded in, fresh as a spring morn, smiling, her eyes sparkling with youthfulness. She was so pretty and winsome that the general's grimness melted.

"Good morning, little sister," he said. "You drop in timely. Flavia is not over-well. I've been sitting up with her all the night, and now you can take my place."

"Ill?" repeated Vivette, surprised at her brother-in-law being back from hunting.

"Oh, nothing," replied the baroness, sliding off upon her feet.

"Oh, but you are dreadfully changed," proceeded Vivette.

"Pure fatigue. I'll tell you all about it. But you are keeping the general, who has orders to give."

"That will not take long. Look to her closely, little sister, while I am away," returned Houlbecq, as he departed.

Vivette was going to her sister when she waived her aside, rushed to the door and glued her ear to it, in order to hear her lord and master descending the stairs more quickly than usual.

"At last!" she murmured, in relief. 'Gone, but he will return. All is lost if I do not hasten——"

"What is the matter?" cried the startled girl.

"Would you save my life? Would you do it though you had to run the same risk as I in aid of me?"

"Save your life?" echoed Vivette. "I would lay mine down any time to spare you sorrow."

"I know that," replied Lady Houlbecq, hurriedly; "but it is not your life you endanger. Are you the woman to risk your reputation for me?"

"Risk my reputation?" repeated the puzzled girl.

"Yes. Hearken to me, but don't require any explanations; I can give none. I pray you to shelter somebody in your own room above——"

"Somebody?"

"A man—there! Yet, but only till nightfall, when he'll get away. And I hope nobody will dream that he passed the hours in your rooms, yet he might be found there——"

"If so, I doubt that any one will blame me," answered Vivette, proudly. "I am ready to guide the man there."

"That's superfluous, for he knows the way; and, besides, I need you here. All I ask of you is complete silence. Not a word to anybody. Now, open the window and look out over the gardens, without stirring—I shall call you in time so that you may not even see the man who will owe his life to you.

"I would rather know nothing," rejoined Vivette, running to the window, out of which she leaned after pushing it open.

"All's well!" ejaculated the baroness, flying to the hangings over the panel.

Her plan was a simple one. She reckoned on Trigavou having ample time to quit the Refugees' Hole and go up to the next floor whilst the general was coming from the lowest story. Briefly, she could bid her lover wait the dark for his flight, and the rest she left to him. She was already touching the tapestry when a gentle rapping came at the room door. She stopped short. It was her maid Rose, who always came at this hour. Ten years in her service, the woman was devoted to her mistress. But she had not been trusted with the intrigue, and the baroness could not suppose she came with other intentions than to attire her. Still she cursed the untimely arrival of the too zealous Abigail, and received her harshly.

"I did not ring," she said, curtly, "and do not need you. You can go."

This was spoken so loudly that Vivette was made to turn.

"It was my lord sent me," stammered Rose, little used to such treatment.

"You are to take orders only from me."

"Master said that my lady was ailing, or I would not have come in so quickly; besides, master is going to spend the day here. I know he has ordered breakfast for two to be brought here."

The baroness turned pale on hearing that she was going to be closely guarded. It was scarcely possible to doubt that the general had divined the black secret.

"Where is your master at present?" she inquired.

"Talking to those plumbers who were mending the leaden roof, in the courtyards."

"Good," thought the wife, "when he gets through, Alain will be safe in my sister's rooms." Aloud she remarked: "Run tell your master that I would rather he breakfasted by himself, and I will content myself here alone with a cup of tea."

Rose was obeying, when in came two footmen, carrying between them a little table, spread and set, which they had only to bring from their master's rooms, for, being a lusty eater, they always had a substantial cold collation ready for him, in case he woke up hungry or came in late after hunting.

The baroness felt cold all over; clearly enough her husband intended to post himself beside her, so that Trigavou would have no alternative to dying of hunger in his den, but, braving the general's rage, quite likely to end him without any explanation. How could the lover escape now? Rose might be got out of the way, but here were the two lackeys; they seemed never to have done laying out the meal, and the general would not be slow reappearing. Her last hope was annihilated, and she saw nothing before her but a shroud.

# CHAPTER IV

## LADY FLAVIA SIGNS HER HUSBAND'S DEATH WARRANT.

INDEED, General Houlbecq came in shortly, and not alone; he had a couple of workmen along with him, who carried a long roll of roofing lead and tools.

"My dear," observed he, in the most natural of tones, "since you talk of keeping to your room, I really must protect you from a danger I noticed to my cost during last night. I wondered where the cold rush came in, and remembered there was an outlet from the old tower. I dare say it is worn away, the fastenings rust-eaten, and those hangings just cobwebs. When you are so much better that you can change your rooms, I'll have the doorway walled up, but at present the work would annoy you. So I will only have this sheet of metal tacked up over the gaps—a makeshift, true, but then it will not show under the tapestry. Now, then, my men, fall to work!"

The horrified lady had no power to utter a word. Vivette was hushed also, too stupefied by terror to fully understand the affair. The maid and footmen alone were not surprised, for their whimsical master was all the time upsetting the house arrangements. They retired, leaving the plumbers to their work, neither long nor hard. The low narrow door was recessed in an oaken frame, on which the leaden sheet was nailed, but as it happened to be a trifle short, there was an orifice of half a dozen inches left at the top.

Resting one hand on the back of a chair, the baroness clasped her sister's hand in the other, watching wildly the operatives' movements, and starting at every hammer blow, as though they were nailing up her lover in a coffin. And, verily, it was a tomb in which they were sealing up the luckless Lothario, for his refuge had no other known issue than this nailed-up door, and his wails could not affect walls six feet thick.

She had expected that the first knocking would advise him of the fate awarded him by the ferocious Othello, and that he would rush forth like a lion, upsetting the workmen and dashing aside the general in his running a-muck. But no token of existence gave he, resigned, doubtlessly, to the most horrible of deaths.

"But he shall not die," murmured she. "I am determined he shall not, if it were only to spite this monster."

When the last nail was driven in, the general made sure by a strong double-handed pull that the shutter would resist the efforts of a desperate man, and then let the hanging fall, and dismissed the workmen.

"There, now!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "I am quite at ease. No cold for either of us. But I am very sharpset, and I hope, my dear, you will not mind my breaking my fast. Not that I even propose your coming to table, as you are not well, and nothing so spoils appetite as a bad night's rest, and I fear you have had no good one. Besides, you'll want to spend some time in your dressing-room. So don't let me fetter you. Vivette, who is the picture of health, will keep up the reputation of her end of the table."

"Thank you, I am afraid not; I am not hungry," faltered the girl.

"What, you off appetite, too, sis? You seem all invalided but me! but I never felt in better form. I could give my youngest neighbour ten pounds and a beating. That's racing slang, for which I beg pardon, but my dear little Vivette understands it for one. But, though you cannot ply a good knife and fork, at least you'll grace the board, eh? We'll have a chat, anyway. You may leave the window open, the heavy blow is over, and a splendid November day is due, with fresh air that always makes me a boy again. You are the Spring, pet, and I am the Summer, the after-Summer."

Whilst he was thus rattling on, the general "pitched into" the patty and emptied a glass of his favourite wine.

Vivette's sister having told her in a glance to accept the invitation, she left her to sink down in the high-backed armchair which faced the arras. The old-time beauties and heraldic beasts seemed to look out on her with a mocking expression, as if to say: "Going to let your lover perish in the trap? Never going to rebel at being your tyrant's laughing-stock? Rise in revolt, if you have any heart!"

Vivette stood by the table where the general was making rapid progress with his repast.

"Well, little sister, what do you say about our return to town," remarked he, between two huge mouthfuls. "That would not vex you, eh?"

"Nay, I am content here, and hope we are not going before Christmas. My poor patients require me, and there's one in particular, the mother of your keeper, who can be attended to by none but me."

"Mother Calorguen. Yes, a good old dame, with a fine chap for a son, though he's changed greatly this last year—grown dreamy and absent, which is queer in an old cavalry man. I fancy he is in love."

The baroness raised her head and darted a hateful glance at the speaker, who continued in the same jocular vein:

"After all, though, there's no law against love-making—in the young. By-the-by, sis, how about yourself? Though you keep your counsel finely and have never let drop the faintest hint, I am fain to believe that last Winter in society you selected some desirable worshipper."

"Come, come; think it over. Troops of fine fellows there. I noticed you were rather kind toward Captain Clamorgan and the Viscount of St. Briac; and there was little Servon, who waltzes so divinely and is a millionnaire. Then, again, last but not least, there's our handsome hermit, our neighbour down here, whom we never see but in the capital, Alain of

Trigavou! Aha, you colour up, Vivette! Don't deny it; haven't I guessed aright?"

The baroness rose abruptly, feeling how pleased her husband was at railing at her torment with such cruel jests. He must have known that the man he had imprisoned was Trigavou, yet uttered the name, and, moreover, to torture his guilty wife, accused her sister of being her rival! She swept past the general, averting her head, and went to the casement, for she was ready to choke.

She beheld that same keeper, Calorguen, whom the baron suspected to be in love. He was walking slowly up a garden path, in his uniform, his hunting knife sheathed, but his gun on his shoulder. It was his hour for making his daily report after his morning round, and, as he was meditatively hanging his head, he did not see the baroness up at the window.

"There is no evidence that it was he betrayed me, and whether he has discovered my intimacy with Alain or not, I am sure he loves me. If I order him to do anything, he will do it, and not be treacherous."

She heard her husband chuckling at his own joke. Anger turned her flaming red. She had a little memorandum book in her bosom, on the first page of which she scribbled four words, tore out the leaf, folded it longwise with a fine twisted point at one end like the false tails with which children decorate flies, and waited for Calorguen to come under the window on his way to the porch. Blanched again, but resolute, she stood ready to drop the scroll, on which her steady hand had traced:

"Rid me of him!"

Rage was not guarded—she never reflected that if Calorguen executed this sanguinary behest, and was accused of assassinating his master, this line would be her death sentence. All she thought of was saving Alain, and to do that, the general must die. She extended one hand and let the note sail, gyrating, to the feet of the gamekeeper. That caused him to lift his head, and he stopped short on perceiving Lady Houlbecq.

This ex-cuirassier was a broad-shouldered, tall blade of thirty-five, straight as a Lombardy poplar, and dark as a Spaniard, though pure Breton born. His complexion was of the bronze from open-air life, his features were marked, and his expression winning. He took off his cap respectfully to the dame of the castle, who pointed to the paper dagger sticking up in the sand of the walk.

Calorguen hesitated an instant, and then picked it up. She made an impatient gesture for him to open it, which he did. The moment his eyes fell on it she saw him turn pale.

What would he do?

She laid her finger on her lips and responded to his questioning look with an imperative sign.

He remained still, as though changed to stone. The temptress divined all that seethed in the heart of the hopeless man who loved above his station, the faithful servant and loyal soldier, whom she urged, with effrontery, to commit an abominable and dastardly crime. She had the appalling impudence, over and above all this, to blow him a kiss. The wretched butt of her temptation clutched the note to his breast convulsively, and fled away instead of coming up the doorway steps. She watched him till he had gone from sight behind the large tower standing out from the main building into the grounds. He took the road to his mother's dwelling, two or three miles away.

"He understood it well enough," mused the baroness. "Will he dare do it? If he halts or is slow over it, Alain will die before I can get free of this brute, who prevents me tearing down that door. And I shall remain at the mercy of Pierre Calorguen. He has kept the writing, and will use it as a rod of power some day. Well, then, I shall kill myself," concluded the half-crazed woman, as she returned to the chair she had quitted for this colloquy in pantomime, and for the issue of the death-warrant against her mate.

# CHAPTER V

## SLAIN IN THE HOUR OF HIS VENGEANCE

VIVETTE had noticed nothing, and the general had gone on chattering while devouring at such a rate that he had pretty nearly cleared the board. The coffee being all ready, he filled up a large cup and took it in gulps with the calmness of one who had no cares and still less remorse.

"It's all very fine, your protestations, sis," said he, in resumption of a subject Vivette had let drop; "it is high time you were paired off. You are getting on for five-and-twenty—excuse me reminding you, pet—and I warrant you do not mean to die an old maid. I would not tolerate such an idea. You assert that no tender sentiment has been inspired by the ladykiller, Trigavou, invisible hereabouts, but prominent in town. I am willing to believe you, and I am not eager that you should wed that gentleman. But you must have a husband, and I take it on myself to find you one not later than this winter."

"I doubt you can manage that at such short notice," rejoined Vivette, with a sad smile. "But I am in no hurry."

"Well, I am; and as you cannot have a dance without paying the piper, I will settle on you such a portion as will make your wedding a more likely matter. I promised you as much when I became your brother-in-law, but talk does not amount to much. Nothing stands but legal deeds, and the lawyers manage even to upset them now and then."

"I am truly grateful to you, my dear brother, but it will be full time to present me with money when I wed, if ever I do wed."

"That's not my way of thinking, little sister. I have passed three score, and I am apoplectic. I may die any day, and I would rather be on the safe side, and leave nothing to be done after death. Do you mind ringing for my man?"

"I will tell him to come up, for I want to give my patients a call, if sister has no further need of me."

The baroness shook her head; she was not sorry to be alone with her husband, who might then lay bare his design.

"Very good," replied General Houlbecq. "You might also send me up the two footmen to take away this table, and add to François that I require writing materials, as they say in the stage business of plays," he added, affecting jocularity.

Vivette asked nothing better than leave to go, to avoid witnessing an explanation between the married couple. She could not guess the trouble, but felt herself in the way of her sister, perhaps dispelling a danger, removable if alone with her husband. Vivette meant to return to her sister as soon as the general left her by herself, as it was hardly supposable that he would camp down there all day long. That return would be in about an hour or so, after her looking to the poor souls in the vicinity of the great house. So she kissed her sister, who also squeezed her hand without speaking a word, and went out.

General Houlbecq had leaned out of the window till the table was removed. The two footmen were not slow to come, and when the valet had put paper, ink and pens on another table, he sat down there to write, as he had promised Vivette.

His observant wife saw him dash off one very short note. He then went on to labour claiming much more attention, for it took him considerable time to fill up a foolscap page, and he read the whole over and over again. He folded this sheet into a large envelope, which he sealed with his own seal in wax; he addressed it and pulled the bell.

"Hand these to my huntsman," he said sharply to the servant who came. "Let him ride as hard as he can to deliver them. He must have a receipt for the large one, the other is not of consequence. If the party is not at home, he must bid them give it him the moment he returns."

"The man bowed and left the room.

"May I know to whom you are sending such pressing dispatches?" inquired Lady Houlbecq.

"One is to your physician, Dr. Avangour, asking him to look round to-day."

"What for? You know quite well that I stand in no need of his services."

"It's just the other way: you do need him—more than you imagine, perhaps! The other letter is for my solicitor at Dinan, and contained my will."

"Your will! Why that was made long ago—you showed me it."

"The one I have just written adds some codicils to the other. Did you not hear me saying that I wished to make your dear sister independent henceforth? So long as I live she would not need that assurance, but when I am gone——"

"I should remain——"

"Such is our hope and belief," returned the general, with icy politeness.

"And I love Vivette more than you could ever do."

"I do not dispute that. But I have just fixed her share; it's the safest course."

The baroness was silent. She was pondering thus:

He has deprived me of fortune. He means to kill me—no! He would rather torture me by leaving me alive. He is a monster, and I was justified in wishing his death. All I hope is that Calorguen will do the deed, and all I burn to know is when he will do it."

"Now, my darling, to my plans," went on the pitiless husband. "I have decided on returning to town as soon as you can travel. The air hereabouts is not good for you, and besides, I am set on marrying your sister off as soon as possible, and there are no eligible partners here. So I propose receiving no end of company, and we shall go about a great deal."

"You will go to town without me," said the baroness, bluntly.

"What do you mean, dear? I hope you will quickly recover. I myself will watch over you, and even never leave you till you are fit for the journey."

"What? Instal yourself in my apartment?"

"Not a very usual thing in French high life, I grant it, my dear; but wives in other countries in the best society manage to endure their husbands' presence. However, I believe it will not be for long, eight or ten days—a fortnight at the farthest. I must ask your medical adviser, and the duration of my stay beside you will depend upon the answer he gives to the first question I put to him."

Flavia shuddered, comprehending.

"He will ask him (she thought) how long a man can live without food. And when he is quite sure that Alain is no more—starved like a rat—he will drag me from this house to Paris; I shall be chained to him, and my life will be one long spell of torture. No, never! I had better put an end to this at once. They shall fight it out, and I hope Alain will kill him."

She rose like a wounded tigress, shrieking:

"Down with your mask! Your false tenderness only horrifies me! Show the courage to say outright that you think there is a man concealed here, and that you aim at an atrocious vengeance."

"A man in my lady's chamber?" reiterated the general with cold irony. "Your illness has become delirium, dear. Where would the fellow be, my good lady! Under the dressing-table, like stage robbers?"

"Enough of your mockery! You know very well what you are about or you would not have sealed up that door——"

"The old tower door? Merely to keep out draughts. Deuce take me if I ever dreamed that the old dungeon was inhabited by other tenants than owls and toads. But, if by any chance I have blundered, allow me to rectify my error. Tell me so, and I will have those men back again to rip off that plate. If anybody is in there, it can only be a housebreaker, and as I am a pretty fair shot still and carry a revolver, I'll wing the rogue if he shows fight. Well, what say you? Shall I ring?"

"No, no," muttered the baroness, terrified. "There's nobody there. It was mad of me."

"I told you so. I need not wonder what put that into your brain. It must be this novel which you were reading overnight when I came in. I had a peep at it myself, and saw there was some stuff about a lover walked up by a cruel husband. They did such things before there were divorce courts. That vile deed haunted you, and the dream came again upon you this morning. Was I not right in telling you that novel reading is dangerous?"

Whilst he was uttering this derisive speech the baroness had fallen back in her chair exhausted, unable even to think. She had no longer the hope to struggle from under the lion's paw. The only chance was in the hunter coming; in other words, that Calorguen should deliver her from the grim jailer who guarded the portals to Hunger Tower. But Calorguen would never dare come up into the lady's private apartments, and the general had resolved not to go forth. She remained in a prostration like slumber, which General Houlbecq did not interrupt, busy as he was in writing notes upon his own affairs.

So passed the day, with no return of Vivette and no appearance of the doctor. The former was probably detained at some sick bed, and the doctor might be out when the baron's messenger reached his house. The baroness had begun to wish for his coming, for she had always liked him, and vaguely hoped that he would help her. But the castle was a dozen miles from Dinan, and this hypothetical assistance was far. The ill-fated woman waited like Fatima under Blue Beard's impending scimetar.

But even this lugubrious November day had an end. It was already closing when the general rang for dinner and lights to see it by. To be more comfortable, he naturally went to close the window, but his wife was astonished to see that he looked intently out instead of so doing. He was evidently trying to recognise some one perceived in the grounds. His wife watched him, and wondered whom he was eyeing so persistently. Scarcely Calorguen, for his master would manifest no surprise at seeing him there ; and instead of studying him from his observatory, would have spoken to him. Who, then? Not the medical gentleman from Dinan, as he would have come by the regular approach, and not through the woods by dusk.

"What are you about there, you?" challenged Houlbecq, in his overbearing voice. "Are you looking for me?" It was evident that he knew the person. "You will soon know with whom you have to do." He shook his fist out of the window. "Just wait till I get down to you." He turned and exhibited his face, so inflamed with fury that his wife flung herself to one side to avoid him in his rush, but before he could take a single step a gun was fired, and he fell, head foremost, almost under her feet. He did not utter a groan ; he did not stir. He had been killed outright.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANOTHER BARRIER BETWEEN THE LOVERS

It never occurred to the baroness to succour the fallen man. Instead of stooping to him, she sprang to the open window. But not a soul was visible in the walk alongside the house, and none on the lawn. A faint puff of white smoke faded in a clump of evergreens. Out of that the shot had been fired, but the marksman had time enough already to disappear. He had probably plunged into the small forest that commenced not far off.

"He will get clear by the breach in the wall," muttered the baroness between clenched teeth. "He will not be caught; I know that. It is Calorguen. He will keep quiet, and Alain will be saved."

Without troubling about her unfortunate husband, stiffening in death on the floor, she strode over him to run to the tapestry, which she pulled up, and then she beat on the metal plate with all her strength, whilst calling her lover by name. He did not answer, and yet he must have heard, for she cried out loudly, and the covering did not wholly shut up the worm-eaten panel. She redoubled her blows and screamed still more loudly, but she could not hear the prisoner's answer or any sound whatever.

"He is dead," she muttered; "and yet that cannot be. One day's fast kills no man. He does not answer me because he fails to recognise my voice, and he thinks it is a lure of my husband's to learn if he be still there. Have I time to deliver him by tearing off this fatal plate."

But the door on the landing opened, a gush of light illumined the room, and a servant who carried the candles announced "Dr. Avangour."

The baroness let the curtain drop, and leaned back against it, her arms extended, as if to prevent passage that way; her eyes wild, her hair loose, and her mouth parted.

The physician paused on the threshold on seeing the lady's strange attitude. He had not yet perceived the dead body, and he wondered if his patient had not suddenly gone mad. But the footman already had espied the bleeding corpse.

"Great heavens!" he cried; "master is dead—killed!"

In an instant the scene changed. The physician believed he understood the cause of the terror so energetically expressed by the lady's countenance, and he did not lose his head. With the coolness acquired in the medical profession, he beckoned the footman to attend to his mistress, whilst he snatched a candle and went down on a knee to examine the luckless general. There was no difficulty in learning that help was vain; the bullet had gone to the heart.

"The shot was not fired at close range," muttered the doctor to himself. "Hence it is no suicide. He has been murdered, it follows—by whom?"

"There—there!" cried the baroness in a hoarse voice, as, hardly able to sustain herself, she nevertheless pointed to the open window. "The shot came in there."

Dr. Avangour rose quickly, ran across the room and looked forth; but, the night having fully fallen, he could see nobody. He returned to the lady of the house and said:

"This is no longer the place for your ladyship, and I must myself go away."

"No, no; I shall not leave this room," returned the baroness, clinging to the hangings.

"In that case, you must allow me to issue certain indispensable orders. A crime has been committed, and justice must be immediately informed. It is my duty to do so, for I am responsible both as a medical man and a witness."

To the valet, who was lingering near in consternation, he added:

"My man is below in the court with my carriage; just ask him to drive to the market town, and bring back a magistrate. Dinan is no great distance, so that the court can be assembled to-morrow morning. But it is important that the first steps of authority should be taken this evening. And, mind! not a single creature is to be let enter this place before the magistrate arrives, which will be in half-an-hour, if you do not lose any time."

"Nobody, sir, not even Mdlle. de Bourbriac?" inquired François.

"My sister?" repeated the baroness, with the air of one aroused from a dream. "No! I do not wish she should see this sorry sight—the shock would be her death. When she comes back, pray tell her that I am expecting her in her own apartments."

"Take care, also, that nobody quits the château," took up the doctor. "Have the garden gate and the park gate guarded."

This sagacious doctor thought of everything, and he believed it his duty to facilitate the authorities' task of finding out the general's murderer. At the same time he had no suspicion as to the culprit, though he had been the regular medical attendant here these ten years, and knew the character of the widow much better than she supposed he did.

He was a man in his fortieth year, thoroughly learned, without any pedantry, complaisant, sympathetical with the upper classes on account of his good manners, and adored by the poor, whom he never charged for his visits.

"Now, my lady," said he gently to the bereaved one, "I address your good sense. I can well understand the feeling which retains you near your husband's remains, but I should fall short of my mission, which is to console the afflicted, if I were to leave you longer to face this horrible view. It was not in my power to have spared you it. You may naturally burn to avenge the death of General Houlbecq, but you must know that to discover the assassin it is better to let the authorities see the body as it fell in order to comprehend how the crime was perpetrated. That is why, too, I have left the window open. But I entreat you, be good enough to pass into the dressing-room, where I shall follow and remain until the coming of the police. The magistrate will, no doubt, have information to request of your ladyship."

For an instant the baroness hesitated to move away from the door, behind which Alain of Trigavou was probably awaiting the end of his captivity in poignant anguish. But she felt that she could not linger here under penalty of directing attention upon the tapestry which veiled her secret. Over and above this, the dead body horrified her. Dr. Avangour had turned it over on the back after his examination, and the death-glazed eyes seemed to gaze on her, wide open as they were.

"As you please," she merely answered, leaning on the physician's arm for him to conduct her to her dressing-room, which a silken cloth alone separated from the sleeping chamber. There he led her to a reclining chair, where she took a seat, and he sat himself beside her.

They were lighted only by the gleam of the candles left on the mantelpiece of the other apartment, and in their twilight the general's wife had less fear of her features betraying the agitation of her spirit.

"Now let us speak of your ladyship," said the doctor. "You are not well—anything but well—or you would not have called me over."

"It was not my call, but my husband's, who always alarmed himself without cause; and granting that I had so much as a feverish touch, the woe that has befallen me has been my cure."

"Nay, you are still feverish, and my attentions will not be thrown away upon you. As soon as you are better you must get away from this fatal mansion, which would always recall a frightful event."

"Do you believe, then, that anywhere I shall forget it?"

"Not the scene you have witnessed; certainly not. But time, that heals all wounds, also calms all griefs. You are young, my lady, and you are not alone in the world. There's your sister."

"Whom I love with all my soul!"

"And who returns your affection with interest. Her affection will console you. But here I am preaching resignation to you, while I feel that it will be very difficult for me myself to recover from the blow which this loss has given me. The man you weep was so kind and true! Who could have borne him a grudge? I never knew he had an enemy."

"He could have had none."

"Then the murder is inexplicable, unless the general is a victim to some accident."

"That may be," observed the baroness, lifting her head.

"Somebody passing through the grounds, whose gun went off by chance."

"I saw nothing. The general was writing till he had to leave off because of the darkness coming. He went to the window, where he lingered a few moments. He was just going to come away, when I heard a gun-shot; he fell a couple of paces back, then, altogether. I was seated by the fireplace. I rose, bewildered, but was going to run to the spot, when you came in."

"The event having so come about, my supposition is not admissible. I will barely mention it to the police. Besides, the perpetrator of an accidental homicide would not have fled. Did you not look out into the grounds?"

"Why, no, I never thought of it," replied the baroness, who had no story ready.

"And, again, there's no public thoroughfare in your property?"

"It is not impossible to get in over the wall, though. We had burglars a couple of years ago, while we were in town."

"Yes, I remember that. One of your keepers caught them; that honest fellow, Calorguen. But a thief would have hidden himself sooner than taken a shot at the general. In any case, I shall advise the searching of the wood. Can you rely on all your household?"

"Yes, all old servants."

"It is no use looking for the assassin in their number. We can only hope that he will be found elsewhere."

The lady offered no comments, and the conversation dropped there. She was too thoughtful to want to prolong it, and the doctor did not know what to say. A conversation beside a corpse, with the widow of the murdered man, is awkward to keep up, and Dr. Avangour had too much tact to try to sustain it with commonplace consolations. Deeming it better not to further intrude on the widow's grief, he went back noiselessly to take a seat in the bedroom, the proximity of the dead having no terrors for him. There he was within earshot of Lady Houlbecq in the event of her calling him.

She did not do so, the solitude suiting her best. Her mind was concentrated on problems, the solution of which affected her a great deal more than the tragical death of a detested mate. When could she deliver her lover? Was it Calorguen who had slain the general? Would they accuse him, and were they to do so and find him guilty, would he answer, to escape the capital penalty, that he had only obeyed a written order of his mistress, one that he could produce to save his neck? Would he betray her to the guillotine?

# CHAPTER VII

## LADY FLAVIA'S TROUBLESOME AVENGER

THESE darksome reflections were interrupted by the slight sound of a door cautiously opened. It was the little door at the other end of the toilette room, where, on turning her head, the baroness saw her sister coming in on tiptoe.

"What have you come for here?" she demanded, throwing herself across her path.

"I knew that I should find you here. For some unknown reason to me, François would not let me enter directly, so I pretended to go up to my rooms, but I slipped down by the side passage. What has happened here?" As no reply came Vivette pursued: "I am so late, because I did not wish to leave Mother Calorguen by herself. Her son, for whom she was waiting, never came till close on five o'clock."

"'Twas he!" thought the baroness, with a shiver, "and it will come out that he only got home a quarter of an hour after the murder—just the time to enable him to go from here to his mother's."

Then she started; she hoped the doctor had not heard the communication of her sister.

Stupefied at this cold reception, Vivette stood mute and motionless.

"Away!" ejaculated Lady Houlbecq. "Up to your rooms and don't go thence till I come to you."

"Then you do not want me here?" ventured the young lady timidly.

"No, no, you are really in the way. Be gone, dear!"

"And yet this morning you said—I—I thought you did, at least—that the man you wished to save had got safely away."

If the girl had continued thus to question her elder, all was over with the secret which the latter had so much interest in concealing from the physician, who might well be overhearing. The baroness could no longer contain herself. She literally fell upon poor Vivette, put her hand on her mouth to silence her, and fairly bundled her out of the room. Vivette was so frightened as to allow it to be done. As soon as she was gone, Flavia shot the bolt and went back to the reclining chair, where Dr. Avangour had last seen her, and where he found her again as now he raised the door-way curtain.

"Eh !" said he softly, "did I not recognise the voice of your sister? You did quite right to send her away without mentioning the catastrophe, which she will learn soon enough. I am glad, too, that the footman has not told her, and hence I conclude that he will strictly carry out the orders which I gave him. Thus the police will find all the people under this roof who were here when the shot was fired. A very important matter, for they must all be examined."

Flavia breathed freely again. The doctor could not have heard the unlucky phrase of Vivette alluding to the prisoner in the tower, and so she hoped that there would arise no question concerning him. The rest was nothing, or, at least, she would have time to prepare to meet the outburst.

Calorguen would only be accused after a rather long inquiry, and there would be lulls and breaks in its course. She calculated that her lover might live two or three days without nourishment, while, on the morrow, perhaps, she might grasp some moment in which to liberate him, when left to herself. She knew where to find tools to tear out the nails in the sheet of metal, and the work would not take over a quarter of an hour. Once delivered, Alain could take refuge in the upper rooms of the castle, and await nightfall for flight. She did not fear that suspicion would fall on him, as he never was seen near the place.

She now forecast the joy of meeting him in the capital, where he would go by way of La Hunaudaie, so as to make it seem that he went straight from his farm to the railway. In Paris she would be married to him after the ten months' widowhood imposed on her by the law, and he would never know that she had commanded the murder. Calorguen would not speak, or if he did, none would believe him. A line on a loose leaf was not much of a proof, and, anyhow, she would deny her writing.

In short, the baroness dreamed of happiness as the reward of crime, and, if Heaven did not intervene, her odious dream seemed in course of realisation. She felt no remorse, shed not one tear for the veteran who lay near her with a coward's bullet in his war-worn breast, and took no heed of the fate awaiting the infatuated keeper whom she had urged to murder. She forgot everything, even to the will which her husband had written under her eyes, though maybe it disinherited her.

Dr. Avangour had returned to the death chamber after his brief looking in at the other. He did not move, but she heard him cough, for he had carried to such an extreme the respect for police requirements as to leave the window open, and he had caught a chill. Hence he was more impatient even than Lady Houlbecq for the officer of justice, who did not come for three-quarters of an hour. That official had jumped up from dinner, and the doctor's horse went at a good pace, but the doctor was terribly impatient, and each minute was a month to him. But to Lady Flavia the delay seemed short as she turned over in her mind the problem of saving her lover and getting rid of her avenger.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE NEST IS EMPTY AND THE BIRD FLOWN

THE rustic magistrate was a character, born on the spot and well-known in the district. He had been a country lawyer, and all the good points of magisterial dignity were his, namely, straightforward judgment, sharp wit, and perfect honour and impartiality. He exhibited no pride of office, and paraded no preconceived opinions; he was plain in manner, naturally conciliatory, but firm when firmness was requisite; he fulfilled his functions in a free and easy way, and settled more cases out of court than in it. A married man and a bondholder, these two advantages won him his superiors' consideration, and he obtained as much affection from his subordinates.

Personally, Justice Miniac was a regular Breton for brevity and compactness of frame, his broad face closely shaven, his dress rather negligent. This forbidding aspect was soon seen to be tempered by a kindly air.

From long service, he had known everybody at the castle, servants and masters. Of course, he knew Dr. Avangour too, and he had a high opinion of him. He had picked up the main facts before he came into the room, and after some complimentary explanations, he needed only the few professional words from the doctor, which made the situation clear.

He asked also after the baroness, and expressed astonishment that she should have remained so near in the dressing-room, and desired to see her. She heard the wish and presented herself, but he would not hear of her re-entering the death chamber. After desiring her to resume her place in the easy chair he opened an interview which began with condolence, but necessarily became an interrogation, though a kindly one, which could not alarm the lady. She was asked if she suspected any one, but she knew of none. One after another all the household were named, Calorguen included, though he slept out of the castle, but, finally, the justice concluded that search must be made elsewhere.

"I compassionate your ladyship's sorrow too much to prolong this conversation," he said with sincere emotion. "It was indispensable, but I have no more to ask now. I sent a messenger to Dinan, so that the public prosecutor will probably arrive this night. To-morrow you shall see him. But I entreat you to take some rest. It is quite useless for you to be present at the investigation of your servants on the scene of the crime whilst awaiting the government official."

"Act as you please, sir. But my mind is made up on my remaining here," replied Lady Houlbecq, firmly. "Besides you may have need of me to verify or rectify the evidence you are going to collect, and I do not suppose you see any inconvenience in my hearing it."

"None at all, my lady," the good-natured justice said. "You are right, too; perhaps I may want to call in your corroboration. Still, I shall consult you in this room, so as to spare you that frightful sight."

"I should find the courage to support something worse, if needs be, to help you to discover my husband's assassin."

"Oh, we shall find him, my lady!" returned the other. "I can promise you that the general's death will be avenged. If the villain who has done the deed escapes justice, mark me! I will give up my office."

After this somewhat risky pledge, he bowed to Lady Houlbecq, and went to rejoin the doctor in the further room.

"The medical report seems to me superfluous," he remarked. "You need not make the autopsy till to-morrow."

"It will not teach us anything I do not know," returned

Dr. Avangour. "The shot was fired from below, the bullet striking the general behind between the fifth and sixth ribs and passing through the heart."

"For the present, I have but to have the inmates of the castle brought before me. To begin with, there is my lady and her sister."

"The latter just came in, as her sister will tell you, and has gone up to her rooms. She was absent when the deed was committed, and I believe she is still ignorant of the misfortune which has befallen her sister."

"Then we had better question her to-morrow. To-night, the servants. As I came along I gave François the order to summon them into the ante-chamber."

He had no sooner opened the door than the procession filed in. As the justice had not brought his secretary with him, the doctor took down the depositions; meanwhile, the baroness, unseen in the toilette chamber, did not lose a word. The servants, led by the head footman, successively told all they knew; in other words, very little, indeed. The general had returned from hunting after midnight. He had found his wife quite ill. He had taken up his watch-post beside her all the day long. Every one manifested the same horror at view of their master's remains, and the waiting maid, Rose, almost fell in a faint.

As their mistress heard more and more, the greater she was encouraged. She thought to herself—they know nothing, and the government officer from the county town will not do much upon so little. One day will suffice for the judicial proceedings, and when all these "bigwigs" go, she could deliver Alain. Vivette alone could suspect what had happened. And very wrong was she to ask her to help in the escape of somebody luckily not named. However, Vivette would hold her peace.

"Have I seen all the household?" inquired the justice of François, whom he had appointed usher for the witnesses.

"All the household, your worship, yes," answered the valet. "The two keepers sleep out. But there are those plumbers who were repairing the roof when his lordship called them into my lady's apartments to seal up a door. They were still on the roof when the gunshot rang out, and wanted to run in, but I stopped them. They are at hand."

"Let them come in."

They came in, dressed for work, and carrying their bags of tools like workmen whose job was over, and who were going home. They related that from the roof they heard the firearm, but, though they looked down into the wood, they had seen nobody. This quieted the baroness, who had trembled when they began speaking.

"Where is the door which you closed up by order of General Houlbecq?" inquired the justice, albeit attaching no great weight to a supplementary question.

"That's the one," answered one of the plumbers, pulling up the tapestry just behind him.

The baroness sprang up and came forward three steps.

"That's no door that you are showing," responded the examiner.

"There's one behind the sheet we were ordered to put up by the general, to keep the draught from coming through the cracks."

In the silence that followed, Flavia's heart thumped as if to deafen her. The justice questioned the doctor with a glance, and received a nod of approval.

"Just let's have that down, so we can see whither it leads," ordered he.

The baroness entered the death chamber. The workmen were getting ready to work, and, eyeing them, the legal and the medical gentlemen did not perceive her, and all the domestics were gone save François. His back was turned toward her.

"Allow me, your worship, it's not worth the trouble to undo the good work. That door opens into the old tower, where nobody goes and whence nobody could come out, as it is only a hollow, surrounded by thick walls on all sides."

"Never mind. Do as you were bid," commanded Miniac. "I want to see everything."

One after another the nails came out under the pincers of the pair of vigorous workmen. In another instant the plate would be ripped off, and Flavia felt sure that her reputation would be gone.

In the tower would be found Alain of Trigavou. There would be no difficulty in guessing that, surprised in my lady's apartments, he had fled thither to elude the husband, and that the husband, knowing where he was, had had him walled up therein. All the country would say he was her paramour. All this she foresaw, and yet she did not despair, for Alain would still be alive and hers!

"Ah, my reputation gone—but who cares?" she said to herself, cheered by her impudence. "At all events, they cannot accuse him of having killed my husband."

The plate was off. The justice opened the door, and led the doctor through, lit by the candle in François's hand.

Behold the culminating moment!

The baroness expected to see Trigavou, pistol in hand, and rushed forward to prevent him committing the additional manslaughter which would embitter the situation even more.

"You're right," said Miniac, "there's nobody here."

The lady had penetrated behind them, and also seen that the hiding-place was vacant.

What had become of Alain of Trigavou?

Perchance she believed that the fiend had flown away with her guilty accomplice, for she fainted away in the arms of Dr. Avangour.

# CHAPTER IX

## WHAT UNKNOWN ENEMY HAS DONE THIS?

THREE days have gone by.

The preliminary inquiry is over, the one opened immediately after the discovery of a crime, and resulting most often in a mere collection of suspicions. The attorney-general, assisted by the magistrate and by the examining judge, had been busy for four-and-twenty hours without issuing any warrant of arrest. Thirty witnesses had been examined, including Lady Houlbecq and her sister.

The former, overwhelmed by the tragic event which had widowed her, had added nothing to her previous statement, and the interrogators, respecting her sorrow, had not harassed her at length. She kept her bed in her sister's room. The latter, not having witnessed the murder, indeed only knowing it by hearsay, had given no information worth record, particularly as she had taken care not to tell the only thing she knew.

There was no question of the old tower as a hiding place. The justice and the doctor had attributed Lady Houlbecq's swoon to fatigue and emotion. They still believed that the general had the metal plate put up to exclude the draughts.

As for the man-slayer, none knew him, and suspicions even fell upon no one. The final impression was that the deed had been committed by some poacher, avenging himself for complaints filed against him by the general, who was pitiless against transgressors upon his manor. This poacher was actively sought for, but was not to be found. And as the hunt was likely to be a long one, even if successful, the permission to bury the deceased was accorded. The surgical examination had furnished no enlightenment. The bullet that caused death was extracted. It was one fitting almost any fowling-piece, and consequently but a vague "pointer."

It was decided that the general should be temporarily laid to rest in the village burial-ground, for exhumation hereafter and transportation to Paris, where he had a family vault in Père-la-Chaise Cemetery. His widow did not oppose this arrangement, and the ceremony was to be carried out in that manner.

At the grave were assembled all the domestics and tenantry. The doctor and the justice were there also as genuine mourners. All the neighbours, too—squires, gentry, and tradesmen—deemed it their duty to accompany to his last home their hardy hunting companion and hospitable landlord.

Old Commander Jugon, a retired naval officer, did not fail to come to the obsequies of the friend whom he had received on St. Hubert's Day in his place at Lanvollon, which he had quitted in the evening to return home, with no suspicion he was hasting to his doom.

After a short and simple burial ceremony, the party left the graveyard, some taking their departure deeply impressed, others—more particularly acquaintances of the general—gathering on the little church green to exchange reflections and conjectures, as usually comes to pass, after an unforeseen loss. Each commented after his own fashion. The hunting set unanimously accused the wicked league of poachers. Commander Jugon was less positive. He reminded his guests that on St. Hubert's Night General Houlbecq, after feasting jovially, had suddenly resolved to return that same evening to Trigavou, though engaged to go out hunting on the morrow. The naval officer was of the opinion that his friend of the other branch of the service had received, by an unknown hand, and at an unknown moment, some note recalling him home, which note could only have been sent him by an accomplice of the murderer, who thought to decoy him before his gun.

Squire Miniac pointed out that the supposititious enemy of the general—one who had no enemies—would not have waited till the ensuing night to shoot him, when it would have been so much more easy to waylay him on the road from Lanvollon to Trigavou, on the dark rainy night. Nobody disputed this logic.

The corporal of the gendarmes, who had drawn near, declared that he was the man to lay the guilty one by the heels with his own hands, to which Squire Miniac, knowing him to be vain and aspiring, answered him with a little sarcasm that such an arrest would be worth a step to whoever made it. The corporal dared not make more of it, but it was clear from his manner that he meant to hurry on a search on his own account.

The groups of mourners finally dispersed, the gentry stepping into their carriages to be driven homewards, the rustics footing it towards the neighbouring hamlets, and the servants using the short cut through the woods to the castle.

Lingering behind, Pierre Calorguen saluted the doctor and the justice as he passed them by, when both remarked a changed expression on the relaxed features of his no longer bluff face. He was controlling himself, but it was plain he had been violently affected.

"There's one who loved his master," observed Squire Miniac, watching him. "He owed everything to him, and carried gratitude to fanaticism. If the scoundrel who slew his old colonel was to fall into his grip, he would execute justice himself, I'll be bound."

"So he would," agreed Dr. Avangour, "an honest blade, and I believe he was most devoted to General Houlbecq. At the same time——"

"Go on. What?"

"I am going to startle you. At the same time I fancy he is in love with the baroness. 'He never told his love,' and all that, of course, and my lady never suspects the passion she inspires."

"What an idea! How came you to entertain it?

"I have caught him two or three times in contemplation under my lady's windows, and he sneaked away like a thief when he found himself under observation. I have also noticed that he eyes her peculiarly when he passes near her."

"The deuce you have! If this be so one might believe that jealousy had urged him to remove the husband; but I rather think, dear doctor, that this unlikely love has never existed out of your brain. I shall take care, too, not to repeat to the Investigatory Judge your appreciation of the hidden feelings of our poor Calorguen."

"Don't be alarmed, dear friend, for I would not confide it to anybody but you, for while I believe that the baroness's charms have disturbed his wits, I also believe him incapable of so dastardly a crime. A soldier does not commit murder, and this man bravely served his country before he entered the general's service. As a proof that I do not doubt his innocence, I am going to his house even now to see his old paralysed mother, who sent for me. Their little house is on the castle road, where I left my chaise. I shall profit by the chance. Come along?"

"I cannot do that. This is my day for hearing cases, and I have no more time to spare, for I came afoot."

"So keep well till we meet again, squire. One of these days I shall give you a call."

## CHAPTER X

### LADY FLAVIA GOES A-VISITING

THE two friends departed with a hearty shake of the hand.

Squire Miniac little dreamed that he would not hold his court because of a meeting he nowise anticipated, and Dr. Avangour still less expected the incidents going to disorder the exercise of his profession.

The good doctor was honest in asserting that he did not suspect the keeper, and his visit to Mother Calorguen's was truly to see how she was with her paralysis, and not at all to question her upon her son's sayings and doings.

This interesting patient, unlike her neighbours, did not dwell in a dirty, incommodious, ill-ventilated hovel. On taking possession of the castle, the general had a good cottage built for his favourite gamekeeper, out of brick and stone in a pretty orchard, and there he had installed the Calorguens, only a few musket shots from his park. They lived there happier than many of the well-to-do, and their neighbours envied their lot.

The doctor called so often on the old woman that he perfectly well knew the road up to the cottage, so surrounded by trees as not to be visible from afar. He went straight up to the garden and was going to push open the gate, when he perceived a woman, all in black, leaning against a tree just outside the orchard. As he came down against the wind she did not hear him, and did not turn round. She seemed to be waiting for somebody.

"It's astonishing how much she resembles Lady Houlbecq away off," thought Dr. Avangour. "But it cannot be she—

what could bring her here ? Besides, I left her in her sister's room, abed."

On account of this reasoning, the doctor passed on without stopping to enlighten a mystery which did not interest him. He was in haste, the gate was open and he speedily reached the cottage, where he entered without knocking. He knew all the arrangements, and that he should find his patient on the ground floor.

There she was, indeed, dozing in a huge straw-bottomed armchair, before a fire of roots which a lad of twelve, sitting on a stool, was trimming and feeding. The dame did not awaken, but the urchin jumped on perceiving Dr. Avangour, who paused to gaze on the scene of still life.

In the depth of the room was the bed, a four poster, closed in with shutters, not curtains, at the risk of smothering the sleeper. They were open at present, so there was a view of the green spread, the needleworked pillow on the bolster—a present from Vivette—and a fine ivory crucifix hanging on the wall, enframed in blessed boxwood. The floor, firedogs, and old lockers shone with cleanliness. On the high shelves old crockery was piled amid pewter mugs and platters gleaming like silver.

Everything spoke of easy competence in the large room, fully lighted, where the dame's supper was laid near the bedside, and the son's little arsenal was in a rack over the mantelshelf—his double-barrelled fowling-piece, his heavy rifle for wolf and boar, his revolver and hunting sword and the cavalry sword with which he had charged at the battle of Gravelotte.

Pierre and the child slept in the garret, but Pierre was more often out than in, and the youngster seldom quitted the paralytic.

He was the son of a canteen keeper and an artillery corporal killed at Sedan. The mother was a Breton woman, dying after the Franco-Prussian war on her return home, and Calorguen had housed the orphan, from the father having been his comrade.

He was a bewitching little fellow, with a pink complexion and fair, curly hair, but he knew next to nothing. The schoolmaster had given him up. He was a stick-in-the-mud, said the louts, to express that his intelligence had stopped at a point beyond which it ceased to rise. But this lack of wit was redeemed by his goodness. He adored the mother and her son, devoted himself to them like a dog, and did his little utmost to make himself useful, nursing the invalid like a trained nurse, cultivating the garden and keeping the house in order.

He was created taciturn, and only spoke when pressed.

Knowing him ever so long, the doctor conceived that his intellect would arouse some of these fine days at the shock of an unexpected event which would dash light and passion into the dormant brain.

"Good morning, Yvon," he said, patting his cheek.

The sonorous voice startled the palsied crone into opening her eyes and sitting up.

"What, is that our good gentleman?" she exclaimed. "The Lord bless you for coming into our house, though at a mournful time. Our poor master——"

"Yes, mother, I am just back from seeing him laid where we must all go one day, sooner or later——"

"For my part, would it were to-morrow!"

"Tut, tut; you will see us all under! Yet I can well understand your grief at losing a good master. But the lady up at the great house is not dead, and she will not cast off either you or your son."

The old woman shook her head as the only answer.

"It looks as if you did not place much faith in her, in which you are wrong. She will take care of you. But let us examine your right side," went on the doctor, feeling the right arm of the palsied woman. "Does it pain you when I touch it?"

"Not much, my kind sir. But I don't believe I shall be able to move it again. Only to think that I have not been to church these seven long months. Oh, dear!"

"You can go to the midnight mass next Christmas eve.

But you'll have to keep on with the rubbing I recommended the last time, and, above all, avoid excitement. Happily, in the life you lead, you are shielded from anything eventful"

"Oh, no; I had shock enough day before yesterday, when Pierre told me that master was dead, and how dreadfully killed, too, good Mary mother. Oh, the vile 'un who killed him will go straight to the hot place, for there's no mercy for the likes o' he!"

"He will first have to pass through a court of justice," remarked the doctor, smiling. "And so far the magistrates have not set about the right way to get him there."

"Only to think that Pierre might have arrested him, God willing! He was going the round in the baron's wood, and might just as well have been on the spot. But he went towards the village, and never heard any gunshot up to his coming home. The kind young lady was here, and she will tell you the same."

"She has told me so. But how can we help fatality? Where is your son, by the way? I saw him at the burial, and thought he would have been home before me."

"Don't know," murmured the old woman dolefully. "He's been another sort these last six months. Before that, when he was not on duty, he never left me; now I only see him at dark, and he does not always come home then."

"Pooh! he's fallen in love!"

"Nay, I don't believe that. Pierre would never go sweethearting with a girl of his own station, and yet he could have married very well in that way. There was the daughter of the farmer of the Morandais, who made eyes at him, and the father would not have said him nay. But Pierre would not hear of it, he aims higher."

Dr. Avangour made no remark. He thought to himself—"I guessed aright. It is Lady Houlbecq he aims at. And I begin to wonder if he did not also aim at her husband too." He could not help smiling at the villainous pun which he would have taken the greatest care not to speak out.

"Will you let me question him on this point when I see him?" he inquired.

"I would like you to do it, kind sir, and if you could cure him of the bee in his bonnet, I should be more thankful to you than if you set me on my legs again."

Little Yvon had settled down on his stool again, and took no part in the talk. The doctor, having no wish to prolong it, was preparing to take his leave. He was sitting near the window, and facing it. On lifting his eyes, he spied through the glass a black form, which flitted past in an instant. He remembered the woman he had seen in the copse, and in one leap reached the lattice, which he threw open quickly. The figure had no time to get away. It turned at the sound, and this time he clearly recognised the baroness, although she was veiled to the chin.

"Your ladyship here!" he ejaculated. "What rashness!"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SERVANT WHO DARED TO LOVE HIS LADY

The reproach which Dr. Avangour addressed to Lady Houlbecq might be understood in two ways, but the lady took it in the better sense, and answered without apparent embarrassment—

"Yes, I was wrong to leave my bed and come out against your prohibition. But I could not stay quiet any longer—I needed the open air, and the idea seized me to go and see my poor old charge once more. I was about going in when I caught sight of you, but I did not recognise you, because your head was lowered——"

"And then you ran away from fear of meeting a stranger. But now that you know who it is, and as soon as you are rested, for as much as you ought not to remain outdoors, you will allow me to offer you my arm as far as the castle. You must not overtask yourself, says the physician, and I rely on your obeying him."

The baroness put the best face on the matter that she could, for she did anything but bless Dr. Avangour, whom she had not expected to find there, not having seen him pass as she was waiting for Pierre Calorguen in the copse. She wanted to have an explanation with Pierre, deeming him guilty, and hoping to get back the note which she had thrown him in her imprudence. She, furthermore, hoped that he would consent to quit France, and accept a large sum of money which she brought to aid his flight.

She knew his nature very shallowly, and reasoned to the injury of her own interest, for the interview she sought might be her ruin. But she was frenzied with impatience. The disappearance of the Count of Trigavou had perplexed her. What could have become of him? How had he been able to get out of the town? Seals having been put on the whole suite of apartments, she had no way to enter and make sure that the hiding-place had no issue. Yet there must have been one, since Alain was no longer there—a trap-door, a sliding stone, some covered way out.

Alain, reared in the castle, would very likely know of this passage, yet he would seem to have perished in it, for there were no signs of life given by him since the fatal night when the general had surprised the lovers. The farmer at La Hunaudaie, to whom a footman had taken a letter of invitation to the obsequies, had said that his master had gone to Paris. From this reply Lady Houlbecq concluded that this man, a devoted servant and the sole confidant in his master's intrigue, did not know where he was. She would have liked to see him, but durst not go to the farm for fear of being noticed. She meant to wait till the farmer came to her place on some pretext or other, when she might manage to see him. Meanwhile, to pacify the impatience devouring her, she determined to hunt up Calorguen.

She felt that she must not refuse Dr. Avangour's invitation, and, passing around from the window to the door, she entered the cottage, though sorely regretting the unlucky idea of leaving her shelter behind the large tree to learn whether the man she watched for had not arrived before her.

The paralyzed woman had recognized the baroness's voice, and was not astonished to see her, but she received her coldly. Apparently she had divined her son's ill-omened attachment to the high lady. The doctor had the same belief, and he clearly remarked how the mother's reception embarrassed Lady Houlbecq. The two women exchanged a few insignificant phrases. The lady asked after the old woman's health, who replied lamenting the general's death, and the conversation was ending there when Calorguen abruptly dashed in.

He lost his colour on perceiving his master's widow. After saluting her, he went to embrace his mother.

"What has kept you, my lad?" inquired Dr. Avangour. "You started from the village before me, and yet I have been here some twenty minutes."

"I went up to the castle," was the gamekeeper's answer. "The young lady had my promise to bear her news of how mother was getting on."

"My sister did not know that I was coming over," said the baroness, quickly. "I have not seen her this morning."

Calorguen was hushed, and the doctor was struck by his bearing, for he observed him. He avoided looking at the general's widow, and when by chance their eyes did cross, his features expressed an emotion hard to account for. Was it love under constraint? Was it fear which electrified his features? The doctor was inclined to the former opinion. Calorguen had nothing to fear from the baroness, yet he had lost countenance when he came face to face with her. But the doctor did not, in the least degree, forecast the discourse suddenly begun by this agitated worshipper.

"My lady," said he, "I would much like a word with you in private."

"With me?" exclaimed the stupefied dame.

"Yes, my lady. It is downright audacity on my part, but your kindness emboldens me. You have taken the trouble to come to see my mother, and as I happen to meet you under our roof, pray do not refuse to hear me."

"Why not here?" faltered Lady Houlbecq, more and more disquieted.

"Because what I have to say concerns your ladyship alone When you learn the nature of the matter, you will approve my not speaking before my mother, and I hope that Dr. Avangour will overlook my acting as I do."

"Don't speak of it, my lad. If you have a secret you have a right to confide it to none but my lady."

"Then you will allow my hearing our honest Calorguen?" inquired she.

"I should think I would, and I'll even be going, not to be in your way."

"No, no, stay, I beg. I will just step out with him into the orchard."

"As you please, my dear lady. I will wait here till you get through."

The baroness looked quite at her ease now, although she feared he was going to acknowledge that he had killed her husband, and to claim the reward of the deed. Her fate was in the balance.

"Well, be it so," she thought. "I'd rather settle it at once."

So she went forth, resolved to face this interview, so desired yet so dreaded.

The keeper's cottage stood lonely in the very middle of the orchard, surrounded by thickset hedges and accessible by two gates, the north for the village, the south for the castle. By the former had come the doctor, the baroness by the latter, and, to await Calorguen, she had taken her previous road till she had quitted her post of observation in order to approach the window.

She stopped under an apple tree midway betwixt the gate and the dwelling. She had regained her self-command, and was quite ready to cope with the man who could break or make her with a single word.

He had followed her closely and took off his cap, halting.

"I have consented to hearing you," she said in a tone of haughty assurance belied by her pallor. "What is your wish?"

"I thought you guessed it," replied Calorguen, not being daunted by a reception probably anticipated.

"Not in the least, unless you have taken as serious what happened in the grounds a few hours before my husband's death."

"I might easily believe you were jesting with me if I did not know what went on in the great house."

"And what do you know?" inquired Lady Houlbecq, quickly.

"That the general was standing guard over you in your rooms."

"Nothing more?"

"No more. Still I thought that you had a violent quarrel with him, and that, giving way to angry impulse——"

"Who has so well informed you?"

"No one in particular, but I gather it from all. Your servants do not hold anything back from me, and I am often up at the house. They were full of the general's flying home at midnight, and his strange orders."

"And from their tattle you jumped straight to the conclusion that I commanded you to make away with my husband? All we need now is your assurance that your killing him was upon that order."

"Ha! do you believe that 'twas I who killed him?" cried Calorguen abruptly, and staring her in the face.

"I believe you will be accused of it."

"And you fear, if that be done, that I will show the slip of paper you tossed out of the window to me?"

"Tossed? I let it fall without intention—without the meaning you attribute to it, and without its being meant for you."

"For whom else, and what was it about?"

"How is that your concern? Do I have to account to you? It is your place to answer me. Come; you picked up that paper, read it, and ran away with it. I could not call you back, but I have the right to ask you what you have done with it."

"Were I to say I burnt it, you would say I lied."

"That I should; and I demand its return."

"So you think me the man to take advantage of such a thing against you? Still I ought not to be amazed at your having such a poor opinion of me, when you really suspect me of having slain my older benefactor, my old officer, for whom I would gladly have laid down my life."

"I do not suspect you, and I should defend you against them that did say so much, but still return me that paper at once. Come, come, you have it with you——"

"'Deed, I've not."

"Then you have thought to keep it as a safeguard in case of anything untoward? You must be the murderer, for an innocent man would not have taken this precaution."

"Your ladyship is wrong. The paper is in safety, and though you had never asked it back, not a soul should see it. I am ready to restore it to your ladyship."

"When, when?" asked the baroness eagerly.

"This evening—shortly—as soon as Dr. Avangour has gone and we can come together again——"

"Then you have it in your cottage, intrusted to your mother?"

"Oh, not to my mother, who might have read it. But it's no odds where it is, so long as I promise it to you."

The widow's eyes beamed with delight. The parley of which she had been so afraid turned to her advantage. Calorguen, after having all but extorted it, let himself be questioned like a prisoner. It was she who attacked and he who stood on the defensive. The battle was won, since he offered to lay down his weapon in the writing which gave him a hold on her. Success surpassing her expectation, she felt she ought to be contented.

"'Tis well," she said gently, as though touched by the sacrifice. "Come into the grounds about nine o'clock this evening, where I shall await you near the gate. After I have that paper I shall be under obligation to you. Meanwhile return to your mother, and tell the doctor to excuse me, as I can find my way home alone. Should he question you, tell him—tell him—anything that comes into your head."

Calorguen had not come to such a conclusion, and he did not budge. The baroness believed she understood his dallying.

"But what are you going to do?" she resumed. "I hate this place and shall leave it for ever. I shall sell the castle, which would always revive frightful memories. You ought to have no more desire than I to stay in Brittany, and if you go to another country, or abroad, which is much better, you will need money to keep yourself and your mother. Rely on my providing, and, as an earnest, pray take this."

She drew from her bosom a packet of bank notes, and held them out to the keeper, who went white with wrath.

"So you do undervalue me? You surely believe that I asked this hearing to sell you the paper which you are to have free this evening?"

"Why else would you not speak out with no bystanders?" imprudently retorted Lady Houlbecq.

"Because I wanted to tell you before I went far away that I loved you, and love you still. You know it, though, or you would never have incited me to infamous crime by a written word. Yes, I am going hence—leaving my native land and my mother that I may lessen the torture I undergo in adoring you, but I cannot accept alms from you, and I forbid your insulting with money the servant who presumes to love you, to worship you, and who would give his life to prove the greatness of the love he bears to Lady Flavia!"

# CHAPTER XII

## THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE AVENGER

"You love me!" repeated the baroness disdainfully.

"Don't pretend to be unaware of it, lady. Yes, I do love you, hopelessly—I am not speaking of the social gulf between—but I hope nothing, because you have your chosen——"

"That's not true!" exclaimed Lady Houlbecq.

"Do you want me to name him? Shall I tell you the very road he took to enter your rooms—how your husband came upon him by surprise and what he did?"

"Wretch! 'twas you betrayed him."

"No—I only longed to kill him. But he would have refused to fight a duel with a gamekeeper, and none but cowards assassinate or betray. Heaven took the punishment in its own hands, and he has died dreadfully—and you let him die because you were afraid of your husband!"

"How do you know he is dead?"

"I am sure of it. The roofers told me of the job the general set them upon. No more than your servants did they wot of the reason for sealing up that door, and they will never know, but I do! I know all about the burrow where your husband had your paramour built in, having been all over it, from top to bottom, when the castle was under repair, and I'll answer for it that nobody could get out of it—a living tomb."

"But he has, though!"

"Do you dream so? Perhaps you will say that the magistrate found nobody when the plate was removed? You no doubt imagine that the prisoner escaped. Escaped!

Good Lord, yes ; but do you know where he escaped to ? He tried to get away, and thought himself sure to succeed, for he knew of a way. He pulled out a stone which marked the opening of a well hole in the hollow of the wall—a well running right down to the ground level. It used to have an outlet at the tower foot, but five years ago that was blocked up. He slipped down into the narrow shaft and found no hole. Most likely he tried to climb up again, but he had no strength for that, and so he lies there—smothered."

"Oh, how horrible !" uttered the hearer in dismay.

"He is dead, I tell you; but not, believe me, because I hope to replace him. By all that's holy, I vow to you that after you get your letter you will never more hear of me. I'll take my oath, too, that it was not I who warned your husband. If I knew who was the tell-tale I would name him to you, for it is certainly he who murdered the general. My personal interest would be in handing him over to the police, since I may get into a scrape on accusation. But you would be entangled, too, and though I should be brought to the steps of the scaffold, I would never breathe a word of what I know. There is nothing further to add. To-night, in the grounds, we'll see one another for the last time. Forget me ! as I shall try to forget your ladyship."

"Dead, dead ?" murmured Lady Houlbecq distractedly.

"If you doubt, go see the base of the tower, the new masonry stopping up the air-hole, time not having blackened it like the other stones. Were you to venture to remove them you would find nothing but a dead man. But I advise you to touch nothing, if you hold to hiding the tragedy played in your apartments that November night. No one will ever know it, save the new buyer of the castle, if he should demolish the tower, and that's not likely."

This time the baroness bent her head under the vengeful speech of the man whom she had tried to make an accomplice, and who denied the crime with an energy and an accent of sincerity which seemed to testify to his innocence. She had lost her lover, and she hung on the discretion of Calorguen, who might change his mind, fail to keep the nocturnal tryst, and treasure the note which placed her at his mercy. She could not cheer herself, though she urged that no one had yet thought to accuse either her or him, and that he could not denounce her without ruining himself. Alain of Trigavou was no longer present to defend her or counsel her, and she tremblingly measured the depth into which a criminal passion had impelled her. What was to become of her, alone in the world with her young sister, whom she shunned since the catastrophe in order to avoid her unanswerable questions? Perhaps she suspected the truth.

And now she knew that she would never see again this lover who had died uncomplaining for her sake. Heaven had set its hand against them, and she had no right to murmur, so merited was the judgment. It bade her flee from this ill-omened castle for that obscurity in Paris which became a widowhood. There she might obtain oblivion, though she felt that remorse would follow her, and that she would never find peace of mind, condemned to live under the perpetual menace of Pierre Calorguen's treachery.

"If he be arrested," she mused, shivering, "he will speak out to justify himself, and I shall be lost, even though he keeps his pledge to return me that fatal reward this night. It will be quite enough for him to speak, and he can easily prove that the general did find Alain of Trigavou in my rooms. If he owns that he did fire the shot, what judge will hesitate to believe that I ordered him to slay my husband to save my honour?"

"Your ladyship is silent," observed Calorguen. "Because you cannot disbelieve what I assert. You cannot doubt my promise also to keep absolute silence on the past, come what may. You horrify me, but, none the less, I love you, and I shall die rather than bring that lovely neck under the knife. Farewell—no, good-bye till nine o'clock, when we shall meet again by the lodge gate."

Colorguen went away without looking back, and Lady Houlbecq made no attempt to detain him. She expected nothing additional from him, and was in haste to return to the castle, where she could cast aside the mask of indifference under which, in this momentous conference, she had been strong enough to hide her sorrow and her pain. There she could shut herself up to bemoan her lost one till the hour for the rendezvous.

"He will come to it," she reasoned, to give herself courage, "and he will quit the country without anyone suspecting him. So I have nothing to fear, and nobody to trouble me. But Alain is no more, and I shall die of despair."

She glided from the orchard and disappeared in the woods before Calorguen had rounded the corner of the cottage where he had left the doctor, his mother, and the boy. Dr. Avangour, who had remained standing by the window, cried out—

"Ha! I see the justice and the corporal of the gendarmes over there. Strange," he went on. "The Squire left me at the burying-ground to go over to Trigavou to hear his cases. He must have fallen in with the gendarme officer, who induced him to alter his course. But what the mischief do they want here?"

"They have a couple of the rank and file with them," added Calorguen, in a low voice, as he pointed to the silver-laced cocked hats glittering in the sun over the orchard hedge.

"Humph!" muttered Dr. Avangour, "that's a bad prospect for somebody. I hope you have nothing to fear from these chaps, eh?" he inquired, drawing Calorguen aside.

"Nothing, sir, or I should not be waiting for them," answered the gamekeeper unhesitatingly; "but I would like to entreat your not telling about my lady having been here. They have not seen her, and there's no use in their knowing it."

"Very well, I understand," grumbled Dr. Avangour, shaking his head. But, though I hold my tongue, that mother of yours will speak. If you will take my cue, my lad, you will go and meet the officers, to find out what they want of you, for it is clear they are after you."

"Let us go," rejoined Calorguen, without wincing.

"He shows no fear, which is a good sign," thought the doctor. "And yet his secret talk with the lady of the castle looks very queer. And again his trying to keep her out of this snarl. There is a mystery in it."

Then the two went forth to meet the law's avengers of blood.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE HAND OF JUSTICE GRASPS A VICTIM

A FEW steps from the cottage the doctor and the gamekeeper met Squire Miniac and the gendarme officer coming from the opposite direction. The two privates had stopped to guard the orchard gate. The corporal looked triumphant—the magistrate sorrowful. All this promised nothing pleasant.

"The idea of seeing you again, my friend!" cried Dr. Avangour. "How about your cases?"

"Adjourned to the morrow," responded Miniac, "for I have, as you see, come along with Grisaille."

Corporal Grisaille was a tall, foxy-headed fellow, with an unprepossessing, surly phiz.

"Come on business here—what about?"

"To interrogate Pierre Calorguen."

"What has happened?"

"Grisaille has received a denunciation, on which I am obliged to act."

"Against me?" demanded the keeper steadily.

"Yes, against you."

"Let's know more about it."

"I am going to tell you all; but had we not better go indoors?"

Dr. Avangour thought it meet he should intervene.

"Stop a bit, my friend," said he, firmly. "I divine what is brewing, and, though I cannot allow myself to resist your judicial functions, I must protest against your questioning this honest man in the presence of his mother. I have just left her, and, you know, she has had a stroke of paralysis, from which I believe she would recover, but a great shock will kill her outright."

"Yet she must know sooner or later," remonstrated the justice.

"Let her know nothing, especially if it comes out, as I believe there will be no reproach on Pierre."

"I can open the examination here——"

"Out in the open field?" ejaculated the scandalised corporal.

"I see no inconvenience in it. The house can be searched afterwards, if there be any occasion for it, all depending on Calorguen's explanation."

"That is all I ask of you, judge," said the medical gentleman, "and, as I am no further concerned, I will take my leave."

"No, no, friend, pray stay. You are not in the way. I may want enlightenment from you. Now, you, Pierre Calorguen, please to answer my questions clearly and frankly."

"I am ready, sir," rejoined the gamekeeper perfectly calmly.

"Did you bear General Houlbecq any ill will?"

"None! I had rather much to be beholden for, as he was my benefactor. I owe him everything, and would have rushed into the flames for him. I see that I am accused of having killed him. That's shame and all nonsense. My whole life speaks better for me."

"I know that. But the crime has evidently been the outcome of some spite. Do you suspect anybody?"

"No one. The general had no enemies, unless the poacher or two punished for being on his estate. But these rogues would rather have had it out with me for having caught them."

"These men are known. They have been questioned, and all proved *alibis*. I pass on to the examination of facts. General Houlbecq did not take you with him to Commander Jugon's, over at Lanvollon, on St. Hubert's Day. Why not?"

"Because he had set me on the night watch, reckoning that the rough scurf would profit by his absence to have a pop at his deer. Besides, he had no need of me at Lanvollon, as his other keeper had been sent on there ahead."

"Did you go on this night duty ?"

"Yes, sir; I made a round from 10 to 3 a.m., without catching anybody."

"Did you know that the general returned home at midnight ?"

"Not till next day, by my mate, whom I ran against, and who told me his master was passing the day along with my lady, who was not at all well."

"Where did you pass the day ?"

"I went up to the house to make my usual noonday report, when I learned that the baron would see nobody. Then I went over to Plumodan Woods to turn out the traps for weasels. I caught two foxes and brought them back here where little Yvon flayed them, and you can see the pelts if you like."

"So you did not go into the grounds ?"

"I went around them on the outside, and gave some time to a breach in the walls, where there was a fall a month ago, and which my lord meant to have repaired."

"At what time were you home ?"

"About five o'clock. Night was falling. I found Mdlle. de Bourbriac with my mother, as you can hear from her."

"You did not hear any gun go off ?"

"No, sir. Nor did the young lady."

"Still you did pass near the house ?"

"The high wind was from me. Our young lady went away almost instantly. I was fairly done up. So I tucked my supper in sharp and went straight to sleep. Nobody came over from the castle to tell me, and I never knew of my master's death till my waking."

All the responses were naturally made and without any hesitation. The look of the questioner and the doctor showed Calorguen that he had won his case. But the gendarme did not appear to be gained over, for he had not lost his suspicious mien, and two or three times he curled his lips scornfully.

"Very clear explanation," remarked Squire Miniac. "But it is now the moment to inform you that a witness affirms to having seen you at a quarter to five take your gun from under a clump of gorse, where it was hidden at the skirt of the wood, and slip into the grounds by the park gate, which was ajar. Only an instant after the shot was fired."

"How is it the witness with such sharp eyes was not sharp enough to grab me?" sneered Calorguen.

"He says he believed you were only shooting a rabbit, so he went on his way. But this very day he remembered what he had seen, and he gave evidence before the corporal."

"A false witness! Who is he? Just confront him with me!"

"It is Jean Baptiste Pillemer, the farmer at La Hunaudaie."

"I might have guessed that. The man hates me."

"For what reason?"

"I hardly know—perhaps because his master always had a grudge against me since the time I informed my lord that the old Count of Trigavou had trees felled on the estate after he had sold it. There was a wrangle about that. The young lord denied it, but they would have suffered for it, only my own lord did not care to go to law."

"Then you assert that Pillemer lies. It will cost him dear if you can disprove him, for the law is severe against false witness. But I find it hard to believe that he would invent the details of the gun hidden in the gorse."

For the first time since Squire Miniac put him in the box, Colorguen seemed disconcerted. After an instant's hesitation he said:

"That is so far true that I had put down my gun—not hidden it, mind!—on the edge of the wood, for it was in the way of my measuring the breach with a foot-rule I carried. But I was not ten minutes in doing all that, and when I got through I found the gun in the very spot where I placed it.

Was Pillemer spying me up in a tree? I cannot say that is so, but I am inclined to think it."

"Is yours a double-barrelled gun?" asked the justice.

"Yes, your worship; a central fire, a nice piece, as good for fur as feather. My lord bought it for me last year in town."

"Was it loaded with ball?"

"Always on night duty. I remember now that after my first charging it I did not think of drawing the cartridges."

"Then they would still be in it?"

"Of course they would. Would you like to see it? It hangs over the fire place."

"Grisaille, just go and fetch it."

"I beg your pardon, friend," spoke the doctor. "You consented to not disturbing my patient yourself, but it would frighten her a great deal worse for her to see the corporal's uniform. Do you mind my going in for the gun? At the same time I will tranquillise the good creature, who must wonder what has become of us."

"Do so," answered Squire Miniac, checking the zealous Grisaille, who was already marching off.

Dr. Avangour hastened to profit by the permission.

"Can you really believe me guilty?" said Calorguen sorrowfully, on being left alone with the magistrate, for he did not consider the corporal as anybody.

"I do not think at all—I only seek to learn—that's my duty. But I hope with all my heart that you will get out of this affair."

This laconic reply was not of a nature to reassure Calorguen, who comprehended at once the full gravity of his situation.

The doctor returned with quite an armoury, the fowling-piece, hunting rifle and revolver.

"Here's all I could find," he said. "Have you any other arms?"

"Nothing but my cavalry sword."

"That is not in question. Corporal, it is your place to examine the firearms."

Grisaille wanted no pressing. He began with the gun.

"Halloa!" he cried, as he extracted the shell of a cartridge. "One shot has been fired."

"It is not possible," stammered the gamekeeper.

"These gentlemen see for themselves. The other is there unfired. That explains itself, one shot having killed the general. This gun has not long been fired, for the left barrel is still black with powder."

He showed his soiled finger to the magistrate.

"What have you to say?" demanded the latter, sternly.

"Nothing," replied Calorguen, confounded.

"Do you acknowledge, then, that you made use of the gun?"

"Not I, but another. I swear that it was not me! Why, I, in that case, would have cleaned it out and put in a fresh cartridge."

"That is an argument for your legal defender to advance. If you have nothing stronger to allege in your defence I must request you to accompany the corporal to Dinan, where the government attorney will dispose of you. I will allow you to say good-bye to your mother."

"Never mind. I would rather she believed me dead. Let us march away."

Dr. Avangour felt that his intervention this time would be of no avail. He sadly shook Justice Miniac's hand and let him go away, with the gendarmes escorting their prisoner. Then he returned towards the cottage, where he had left the old woman napping.

"Deuce take me if I know how to explain her son's absence," he mused. "And I only wish that was all that worried me. But there is Lady Houlbecq. This luckless fellow has killed the general because he loved his mistress—that's clear as day. She knows as much, and I'll wager that she is longing to see me up at the castle to tell her the news of what happened after her departure. Now, what can I say? Hang it all!" concluded the prudent doctor, "I shall go to Dinan without seeing her at all."

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE SISTER'S REVELATION

In a month after the general's death, his widow and her sister sat together in a parlour of their winter residence in Friedland Avenue, Paris. They had been in the city three weeks. After early agitation a period of what was relative calm had succeeded, which Lady Houlbecq all the more enjoyed as she feared it would soon come to an end.

She had left Trigavou three days after the funeral so precipitately that her departure resembled a flight.

Calorguen had not come to the appointment for a good reason. She had waited a couple of hours in her ignorance of his arrest, the doctor having avoided an explanation and the servants not repeating it in her hearing till the morning. There were no particulars, and the cause was not known, but everyone suspected it. All that came out was that the gendarmes had taken Calorguen over to Dinan, where the high court had ordered him to be imprisoned.

Here was ample to render Lady Houlbecq uneasy, not more than half relying on the keeper as she did, and very little would have turned her from going to Paris into embarking at Saint Malo on the steamer for Jersey. But second thoughts had told her that to sail for a foreign land would have been almost avowing her guiltiness.

She was puzzled, too, whether Vivette would consent to follow her, and what would become of Vivette if she remained alone in France. What would her sister think—what the world—of this inexplicable casting off of family ties?

All these considerations would not have hampered the baroness if her lover had been in England or coming there to join her, for then she would have led that independent life with him which she had longed for. Had she not proposed it to the Count of Trigavou? Before the crime was she not ready to brave the scandal of a noisy rupture and her husband's anger? But Alain was dead, smothered in a loathsome well, as Calorguen had stated, and this she could not dispute. The best proof of that was that no one had seen him since that fatal night.

Farmer Pillemer believed and said that his master had suddenly gone to Paris, but he had not been seen there.

Lady Houlbecq had made inquiries herself at the house in Miromesnil Street, where he had rooms, but the housekeeper was without any news. Besides, were Alain living, he would have shown himself, or at least written, to relieve his beloved of frightful anguish.

Flavia therefore hoped no more to see him, and naught remained of this mad amour but the painful memory and the fear of paying dearly for the guilty folly. Calorguen had sworn to keep silent, and he had done this so far, but would he stand true to the end when he could extenuate the crime, though not clear himself, by proving that he was incited by his mistress? And even though he maintained a heroic muteness, might not the accusatory writing be found? If not in the gamekeeper's house, probably doomed to be searched, it would be under some custodian who might hand it over to the magistrate to free himself of responsibility.

Therefore Lady Houlbecq fretted in mortal dread, and durst not even write to Dr. Avangour for news about the gamekeeper's case, still less to her steward and gardener—the man left in trust at the castle.

The neighbouring gentry were not sufficiently her associates for her to open a correspondence with them. The result of all this was that the baroness remained uninformed, for Vivette's intelligence from Mother Calorguen was scanty and indirect, from her inability to write. Since her son's arrest she had taken to her bed and hardly ever spoken—at which the widow was not sorry, for this sorrow-stricken mother might have said something dangerous. Little Yvon, half an idiot, was not to be reckoned with. Dr. Avangour was discreet by his character and profession, and the baroness might trust to his making no mention of her being found wandering around the gamekeeper's cottage, and having a long talk with him in the orchard.

On that side, no danger.

Calorguen was at Dinan, where the case was being built up, with nothing leaking out of what occurred in the prison and the judge's closet.

Lady Houlbecq could do nothing but wait for events.

Her sister was the cause of thought. Vivette could not have forgotten the brief, animated scene interrupted by the arrival of the waiting-woman, and it would have been natural for Vivette to remind her elder of it. But ever since Vivette had not alluded to the singular episode, or to the no less singular proposition of the baroness that she should harbour a man in her rooms. Yet, like everything else, she could not be ignorant of the metal plate nailed over the door and taken off again some hours subsequently. Still, Vivette offered no allusion to this either. Had she divined the secret which the general had carried with him into the grave and Pierre Calorguen had vowed to keep as well?

Flavia was tempted to believe this, for Vivette hardly spoke to her now, plunged into a dark sorrow for which the general's tragic death did not wholly account.

Formerly gay and active, she ceased to smile and never went out of doors. Flavia reasoned that her sister, with all her surmises, could not suspect the man to be saved was the Count of Trigavou, and as nobody had been found in the tower, she further hoped that Vivette would never ask for an explanation of the facts preceding and following the crime.

The sisters lived like recluses. On their arrival in the city numbers of letters of condolence and avalanches of cards had been received, but all callers had been pitilessly excluded. They had no near-of-kin, as the aunt who brought them up died three years ago. And their previous acquaintances had become indifferent to them.

One man alone had ever interested Flavia, and he had disappeared for ever. Vivette had never shown preference for any one, and so the isolation must have appeared less painful to her.

The baroness had seen only her Paris solicitor, who had come to read the will to her, a long while in his safe, by which Baron Houlbecq constituted his relict the universal legatee on condition of paying over to Mdlle. Vivette de Bourbriac a sum equal to that he had given Flavia as a marriage portion. Had he revoked this on the day of his death, as his widow feared, in the writing sent to his solicitor at Dinan ? Six weeks having elapsed without hearing from that gentleman, she began to believe that the baron had only modified his original intention, perhaps merely increasing the donation to his sister-in-law without disinheriting his wife.

She had so pressed on the transfer of the legacy that the funds were already paid into Vivette's account at the general's bankers. She had hurried this operation because she had made up her mind not to live any longer with her sister.

Vivette was near her majority, and possessed an independent fortune now. Consequently she could renounce her elder's guardianship and live where she liked and marry a husband of her own choice, unless she preferred to preserve her freedom.

This separation pleased Flavia for more than one reason.

To begin with, there was this cloud between them, one that the baroness did not strive to pierce. Besides, the latter had come round again to her early idea of living abroad, since nothing more bound her to France. Her heart was empty, her life aimless, and Paris was becoming as hateful as Brittany. And she ill assented to this vacation when her heart was not dead, and there's much to occupy a woman even after five-and-thirty.

But, before she took a final decision she meant to have an explanation with her sister.

One December day early they were sitting at the fire opposite one another.

Vivette, more silent than ever, was working a crochet bed-spread for Pierre Calorguen's mother, and kept her eyes down on her taper fingers toiling with unparalleled activity so that the work advanced rapidly. But it was clear her thoughts were wool-gathering for quite another end. Her watchful sister judged this the hour to break the ice.

"What are you thinking of?" she challenged her abruptly.

The girl started and looked up, blushing as though caught in some fault.

"Why are you troubled?" continued the other. "My question is quite natural. You are so sad that I am fretting to know the cause. You may answer me that you can never console yourself for our loss. I, too, bewail our excellent benefactor, but, at your age, nothing but a love disappointment causes profound grief. Are you then in love with some one?"

"No," murmured Vivette, "and I am sure that no one will ever love me."

"Don't talk nonsense, sister mine! You have naturally all that one needs to captivate, and you are quite a wealthy woman since my husband's legacy. You may make an excellent alliance. If you have singled out some distinguished gentleman, you do wrong to hide the matter from me, for, wishing you to be wed as soon as possible, I would help you. You can understand why I wish your speedy union when I tell you that it is my fixed intention to leave France without any idea of returning. It will pain me much to leave you here, but this must be."

Lady Houlbecq thought her sister would make a scene, entreat her to remain, beg to follow her, or at any rate inquire the reason for this radical resolution. LadyHoulbecq was altogether wrong. Vivette received the news without a quiver and remarked coldly—

"You will do well to go."

Flavia turned paler, saying to herself—"She knows all!" But she had the power to conquer her emotion and proceed:

"I am glad to hear your approval. You are reason itself. And since you do not see any hindrance, I shall go as soon as I shall have settled what business has so far detained me. Trigavou Castle and the estate are for sale. This house will also be offered. My man of business assures me that they will all be disposed of before the year's end. But what are you going to do?"

"I shall keep rooms here, but I shall buy a little place in Brittany to spend most of my time."

"In Brittany?"

"Yes, in the district where I have my poor people to look after."

"What strange notions you have! Such a partner as I covet for you will never look for you on the heaths of Trigavou."

"No more than in Paris. He does not think of me."

"Ah! then there is a lover?"

"A beloved, who never paid me the least attention, though I have often met him."

"Some one I know, then?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why have you never pointed him out to me?"

"Because I did not wish him to know that I cared for him. You might have given him a hint."

"One you love still?"

"I am trying to forget him."

"That is wrong, if he is an eligible partner."

"Perfectly—in age, rank, fortune about the same—all just meet."

"And you have long been seeing him?" inquired Flavia, singularly moved.

"Since the beginning of summer."

"But as we left town——"

"Oh, he came down in the country also. He was our neighbour, and it was his own pleasure that he did not come frequently to our house."

"His name, his name!" cried Lady Houlbecq. "I must know that!"

"Why should I not tell you, my sister—you alone? 'Tis the Count of Trigavou."

## CHAPTER XV

### HIS HEROISM A SHAM, LIKE HIS LOVE

ALAIN ! it was Alain of Trivagou whom Flavia's sister loved !

Struck to the heart by this unexpected avowal, the widow turned pale and leaned back voiceless. Memories flocked in upon her suddenly. Only a few hours before his death she remembered that the general had joked his sister-in-law upon the preference he accused her of entertaining for the Count of Trigavou, and that the blushing girl had but faintly defended herself. What Lady Houlbecq had taken for bitter jesting on her husband's part from an endeavour to disquiet her on her lover's fidelity was the truth, uttered without his knowing it was so. He had spoken at random and had hit the mark. Vivette loved Alain and now ventured to tell her. At least here was the proof that she had never suspected she had ensnared their neighbour.

But in spite of this assurance on the one hand, up sprang a dull rage into her brain at the mere thought that she might have had a rival. Flavia ran on so far in her fancy as to fear that had Alain lived to this day, Vivette would perchance have won him away from her, and for the possibility she cursed Vivette.

With one word she might have repaid her for this pain; she had only to say, "Your beloved is dead," but Vivette would not be content with a bald statement. And the explanation could not be given without relating what occurred in my lady's chamber on that awful St. Hubert's night.

She had the self-command to repress the outburst on her lips and to question her sister, instead of wringing her heart with the news that Alain of Trigavou would be seen no more among men.

There were other reasons for so acting. Already she suspected that Vivette's confession was not complete, and she wished to learn the full growth of the flame springing up in that young heart. The count must have perceived it, and the baroness believed him quite capable of encouraging it by some of those masculine arts which too often captivate inexperienced maidens. He could not be punished out of this world, but she would willingly be revenged on Vivette. She cursed her already ; she thirsted for an excuse to make the guileless pay for the guilty.

" Well, it seems to me you have not set your choice badly," she commenced after a long pause. " The Count of Trigavou is an accomplished gentleman, and I am astonished that you should have so long concealed your selecting him. Had you told me I should have approved your choice."

" What was the good of telling you ? I repeat that he never paid me the least attention."

" You may mistake on that point. Last winter you waltzed with him every time you met at a ball, and he has often spoken of you to me."

" Really ? " ejaculated Mdlle. de Bourbriac, with a vivacity leaving no doubt on the state of her heart.

" He eulogized you so warmly that I almost expected leave formally to pay you his addresses," replied Lady Houlbecq, perfidiously. " How was it you did not discover you delighted him ? You are silent. Be frank and admit that, though he may not have actually framed a proposal, he let you at least perceive the tender feeling you had inspired."

" Well, once, maybe—" faltered Vivette.

" Yes ; where—when ? "

" At a ball, Lady Sartilly's—the last of last winter's—as we were about going down into Brittany. As he led me back to my place after a long waltz he told me that he could not have consoled himself at my departure, but he had the hope to see me soon again at Trigavou. That he would do all he could to bring that about, though your husband did not appear over-desirous of receiving him ; that, in the hope of obtaining invitations to the castle, he would go in for hunting, though he detested it. In short, that evening I might readily believe that he had a fondness for me."

"How did you answer him?"

"Not at all. I was too confused."

"And did you not see him again in Brittany?"

"You know he came once a year to pay the general the call of courtesy. I was not at home and he did not appear with our regular visitors. Later, attending my charitable charges, I sometimes happened to see him at a distance, and I thought he tried to draw near and speak to me, but I was frightened and slipped away."

"Frightened of what?"

"Of letting him see that I loved him."

"I had no idea you were so timid," remarked Lady Houlbecq, with poorly disguised gall. "You will get rid of this defect in time. And since you intend living near Trigavou, as soon as I leave the country, you will have plenty of chances to meet your idol. Marry him ; 'tis the very boon I wish you."

The tone was so unmistakable that Vivette comprehended that her sister was making fun of her. Tears sprang to her eyes and the colloquy suddenly ended.

It was Flavia who had originated this colloquy, so full of surprises, and she had carried it on to the actual point. She might much sooner have obtained these sincere confidences by questioning Vivette, and she already regretted having obtained what wounded her deeply. She had learnt that the lover whom she worshipped to the point of sacrificing her reputation and repose was impudently courting one sister at the very time when the other was braving so many dangers to keep stolen interviews.

What were men worth when this one thus betrayed his trustful darling?

And with what design was he ensnaring a girl who might be his by wedlock, this villain who offered so many excuses when she suggested her running away with him to be married eventually abroad?

He was dead; yes, but not in the way his dupe believed. He had not resigned himself to support the tortures of famine and he had not dared to brave a husband's sword. On the contrary, he had tried to sneak away and had almost gaily submitted to be sealed up in the tower because he believed it certain he could slip out by a channel known to himself alone. His heroism was a sham like his love, a mere shift to escape the dread wrath of the general.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A DIRGE OF DEATH FROM BEYOND THE SEA

There was assuredly good grounds for Alain's depreciation in Lady Houlbecq's eyes. By degrees she cast off her illusions and began already to regret having so much admired him. But she had not got so far as to regret loving him, and still in her heart lingered a wish that she could see him again.

Out of these reflections she was roused by her sister's voice.

"No," said Vivette, slowly, "I shall never wed the Count of Trigavou, and it is not to meet him that I am going back to Brittany. It would be distasteful to marry near where your husband was wickedly done to death."

"A death that will be avenged," muttered the other gloomily. "They have arrested the assassin."

"In Pierre Calorguen? No, he is innocent."

"What do you know about it?"

"He will prove it."

"I hope so, as much as you, more perhaps, but I do not believe he can clear himself. Appearances are against him."

"Heaven will intervene."

"Heaven!" reiterated the baroness bitterly. "It did not intervene to prevent the crime. If this gamekeeper is innocent, who is guilty?"

"I do not know, but I shall try to find out."

"Is that why you are going down there?"

"For that, and to take care of a mother deprived of her son."

"I approve. But this is no reason for you to remain lifelong unwed."

"I am not sworn to that."

"Oh, you would not refuse a suitable match?"

"Not one that would please me."

"Then would you marry our Cousin Olivier?"

"I do not know, but I might in course of time."

"She's fencing," thought Lady Houlbecq. "She loves Alain more than ever, and she would only marry another out of spite."

"That's a far cry, though," observed Vivette. "Olivier is in China, thousands of miles off, and may never come back.

"He has come back. He has obtained a year's leave, and reached Paris yesterday. I had a line from him this morning, answering a call at two o'clock this very day. I did not intend to be at home to him, but if you care to see him——"

"Do just as you please."

"Olivier is of our family. He is handsome; has a little more money than you; is only thirty, though already a first lieutenant, promotion being rapid in war times——"

"I think nothing but good of him, but I do not know what he thinks of me."

"Mark my words! Before sailing on this voyage, which has kept him three years away, he declared plainly to me that he would have no other wife than you. He would have told you the same, but there was no time on the eve of sailing. He was not sure of ever coming back, and it was not a favourable moment. But he promised to ask for your hand on his return, if you were still free and had no dislike for him. And he's a gentleman of his word. I have never known a more reliable man. Therefore it depends on you to have the wedding in a month——"

"I'm in no such haste."

"But the gentleman is, and small blame to him, for you might, notwithstanding what you say, let your flame for my Lord of Trigavou revive."

"There's no fear of that. I know my own heart and I can rule myself."

"You are a lucky woman," returned Flavia, ironically. "So you give up the whim to plant yourself in Brittany?"

"I shall see about it. In any case, I do not give up the intention to take a trip there very soon. Will you not yourself be obliged to go there shortly?"

"I hope not. There's no call. The sale of the castle can be managed without me."

"I dare say, but do you not think that if our unhappy Calorguen is brought to trial justice will require your testimony?"

"I? What an idea!" murmured Lady Houlbecq, visibly affected. "I have no evidence to give; I know nothing."

"But you were present when your husband was shot; he fell at your very feet. Do you cheat yourself into the belief that you will not be summoned?"

"But they have questioned me."

"Just as they did me and all the servants. But you alone were on the scene of the shocking murder. You will have to describe it all over again to the jury."

"I shall not! I will write an excuse to the bench of judges. They never can force me to appear in court whilst trying my husband's murderer. I will tender written evidence, if that is compulsory, but as to a personal appearance——"

She was interrupted by François, the former valet of General Houlbecq. He showed his face at the door to ask in a low voice if her ladyship was at home to Lieutenant Olivier Derquy.

"Oh, show him in!" said the baroness, enchanted at this diversion cutting short risky discourse.

François had scarcely more than time to step aside, for the naval cousin was at his heels, and rushed in like a cyclone, saying—

"It's well I knew that you would not cool my heels at the door. You would not turn away your nearest relative fresh from Formosa. How d'ye do, Cousin Flavia? How are you, Vivette, my coz?"

He offered his hands, which were both promptly taken and heartily shaken, for our young seadog was winsome generally, and there was no sulkiness that could stand against his dash. Lady Houlbecq, indeed, tried hard to assume a befitting air, but the lieutenant said—

"Yes, yes, I know, the poor old don is gone! I heard of it on landing at Toulon. Queer thing, life is. When I gave him good-bye on starting for Tonkin, he said, with a laugh, that we should most likely never meet again, meaning that I should never turn up at the muster. The fact is, I had many opportunities of leaving my bones thereaway, and yet the old buck takes the lead, you see. How can we help it? No man's skin is shot-proof to a scoundrel in ambush, who brings you down like a rabbit, and there must be a better reason than the inevitable to fret and grieve, eh, Flavia? But now let's talk about yourself—yourselves—that will be an agreeable subject."

"Not much more cheerful, my dear Olivier," rejoined Lady Houlbecq. "We have passed a month in tears and repining."

"You shall weep no more, since I am on deck. I promise to enliven you, for I reckon on you receiving me every day. I have some of the merriest tales to tell you of John Chinaman."

Vivette looked at the good-natured young gentleman, who returned jollier and more reckless than ever through many a danger and fatigue. His bearing and his speech seemed to her rather unseemly at this juncture, but she could not help liking him none the less.

"We'll chat about China, Cochin China, old China, or any China you like," he resumed, "but, before we begin on that, let me have done with all churchyard subjects. Just imagine that I have newly learnt of the death of an acquaintance of mine, and of yours too, cousins, one of your best partners in the waltz, my dear Flavia, and one of your rural neighbours."

"Of whom are you speaking?" demanded Lady Houlbecq, quietly.

"Of the former proprietor of Trigavou, of course, of our dear Count Alain, so jolly a table companion and so good a fellow," responded Derquy.

"Dead!" murmured the girl. "Count Trigavou dead! It cannot be."

"What! did you not know it? You must allow that it is strange to have the news from a man fresh from the Antipodes."

"But how did you learn that?"

"In the simplest way. Yesterday I got back and came down here to find the door closed. I was put off till the morrow. Twenty-four hours without seeing you seemed hard, and the time did hang heavy. No mate of mine in town, though I spied around the Helder Café at the very hour when everybody comes for his bitters. Then I thought of that trump Trigavou, who had made me a *pro tem.* member of his club before my embarkation. I went round to see him. He was not there; but they gave me his address, No. 19, Miromesnil Street. There the doorkeeper declared that he had no news of him, and that nobody down in the country knew what had become of him. Since a month he had vanished, and as he had gone without his traps and with little money, none doubt that he had been made away with. Our dear old Brittany must have sadly altered since I went away that men can be knocked over the head as easily as under the Black Flags. And you were ignorant of this mishap, my cousins?"

"I knew," remarked Flavia, "that the Count of Trigavou had suddenly quitted the farm where he lived a few miles from the castle. I understand that he often absented himself for rather long periods without warning, and nothing proves that he is dead."

The expression on her face contradicted her words, and Vivette, reading in her sister's eyes, turned so pale that the naval officer stepped up nearer and asked her what ailed her.

"Nothing," faltered Vivette. "Since my brother-in-law died I have been nervous, and I so little expected to hear further bad news that——"

"Excuse me for having uttered it so abruptly. I was confident that you knew it, and, besides, I believed that poor Trigavou was not an intimate friend. I remember that he displeased the general. I never knew why, for he was a charming fellow, a trifle conceited, I grant, but very amiable and obliging. He was once my second in a duel, and I have been most grateful to him ever after. Such services are not soon forgotten, don't you know."

Derquy might have run on a long time without check from his cousins, who were not heeding him. Less troubled than her sister, because the lieutenant told her nothing she did not already know, Lady Houlbecq watched Vivette restraining her tears with difficulty, and took a cruel pleasure in seeing her suffer who would have been her rival had Trigavou lived.

She said to herself that he would perhaps have cast her off for Vivette, and she almost felt consoled for losing him.

Greatly surprised at the effect his intelligence had produced, Derquy vaguely felt that he had blundered, and he sought to repair the fault.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STING FROM THE GRAVE

"I SEEM born to commit nothing but folly," cried Derquy, beating his forehead. "And I am not cured by three years' practice with great guns! I have clean lost the art of tact and discernment. But this shan't happen any more, I promise you; and from fear I may go on babbling athwart the due course, I'll resign the speaking-trumpet to your ladyship. Flavia, you must have a mass of news for one arriving from the most outlandish climes, and knowing nothing. Post me up to date, as the supercargoes say. I am a blank from when I said farewell in 1881, as I left for Tonkin."

"I have not forgotten your parting," answered the baroness, "and could repeat what you said—aye, word for word."

"So you may," returned the officer, laughing. "I should even be infinitely glad to profit by the fact of Cousin Vivette being by to hear the report of our conversation."

"I'm quite willing, if you hold the same ideas."

"I hope you don't suspect my having changed. We have known one another since infancy, and you must be aware that the least of my faults is stubbornness, like a true born Breton."

"Precisely what I was telling Vivette when you dropped in."

"May I know what she answered?"

"Ask her that yourself, cousin dear!"

"Ask her that myself? Not I; I fear too much to get a downright refusal. I prefer for the time to simply lay down the situation. Kindly hear me out, Cousin Vivette, whilst I present myself as Olivier Derquy, nine-and-twenty years of age six months ago, a first lieutenant since a year. My mother was a Bourbriac, a sister of your father. We are therefore cousins german. Our surgeon on the *Bayard* man-o'-war calls this a barrier, and all through my campaign made my life burdensome with lectures on the danger of consanguineous marriages. All I can do is hope you do not share the notions of this pessimistic wiseacre. Now that you have my standing defined, civil and naval, I pass to the supplementary items. My father left me a capital of five hundred thousand francs, into which I have made no serious breach. I was too deeply in love with the girl I left behind me to be a spendthrift."

"Vivette has a hundred and fifty thousand francs herself now," interrupted Lady Houlbecq.

"How's that?" asked Derquy, frowning. "I thought she had next to nothing."

"She was no richer than I when I married, but the general settled that sum on her in an old will."

"The deuce he did?" grumbled the lieutenant.

"That seems to vex you," resumed the baroness with a questioning smile.

"I confess it does a little. I have always hated to be thought a fortune-hunter, and I looked to wed a portionless girl."

"But, cousin dear, Vivette has far less money than you."

"Still it's too much. However, it is no fault of mine, and poverty is not compulsory. I now touch upon my prospects. I like my profession, in which I have made my mark. If Yellow Jack or a bullet does not strike me off the pay list, I may be a captain a few years off, and an admiral at fifty. Splendid post that, and I should be proud of it. But I love my cousin even better than my career, and, if Vivette exacts it, I'll send in my resignation without any regret, to marry her. That's my programme, as those frauds, the members of the House, say, who higgled and haggled over our pay for pitching into the Emperor of the Mandarins. I wait your rejoinder, and will reply."

This uncommon declaration displeased Vivette less than a regular proposal directly offered. Frankness glowed on the loyal seaman's face as he promised without hesitation to renounce glory, cocked hats, and gold epaulets all for her. She felt that happiness dwelt in a union with a man who would consecrate his life to her, and yet she hung back from saying yes. Though the Count of Trigavou was dead, his memory still flourished in Vivette's mind. First love is not so fleeting in a maiden's thoughts, and Alain retained his place. But, understanding that she was bound to speak, she answered in an agitated voice:

"I had no idea, cousin, that you would go ahead so fast. Flavia told me that you fondly thought of me, and I do not forbid her telling you what reply I made."

"I prefer to learn it from your own lips, my dear Vivette," said the naval officer quickly.

"Well, I answered her that I would be happy and honoured by your wedding me. But I cannot think of a wedding whilst there is mourning in the house."

"Oh, I can wait—I have a year's leave."

"And then again," went on Vivette sadly, "I have a mission to fulfil."

"Diplomatic?" queried Derquy, laughing.

"A holy one which I have put upon myself." Here Flavia lifted her head to watch her sister, who pursued: "General Houlbecq was murdered, and an innocent man has been accused. I have taken an oath to discover the real criminal."

"I approve, and, come to that, why should I not lend a hand? I will be your counsellor, your private policeman, your detective, anything you like, and you'll see that the chase shall come under our guns. We are good at all games in the navy. Jack's jack of all trades, I tell you."

"Confound her bringing him into it!" thought Lady Houlbecq, very little pleased by the involving of Lieutenant

Derquy in this darksome imbroglio where her honour was at stake.

"I accept," said the girl, holding out her hand to the gentleman, who kissed it.

"And only to think that I was afraid of having nothing to do!" he cried joyfully. "A man to be saved! It's like a man overboard! And then there's a reward, eh, coz?"

"Even if you do not succeed, I shall be profoundly grateful for your having tried."

"Thanks, Vivette; but I shall succeed, though I have to regularly settle down in that part of the country. Luckily I know the lay of the land, for I was born and brought up there, and I know how to get the lads to chatter. Rely on me. The general's death shall be avenged."

"My dear Olivier," said the widow gravely, "I share your joy. Have you some pity on my grief? Do cease to speak of that doleful story, which my sister wrongly keeps reviving, also, too often."

"I beg your pardon," said Vivette, "I was wrong, and I promise you——"

The door opened a little again and François reappeared, carrying a visiting card on a salver, which he presented to the baroness.

"Dr. Avangour!" she murmured, changing countenance. 'I—I shall not see him. Tell him I am not in."

"What?" exclaimed the lieutenant, "Avangour, the doctor of Dinan! Why, he is one of my friends! When he came over to Trigavou I never could tear myself away from him, and I shall be awfully pleased to see him again. If you must decidedly refuse to receive him, allow me to run and shake hands and find out where he is staying in town?"

"And, sister, you'll also let me ask news of his and my patient and Pierre Calorguen," added the girl.

Lady Houlbecq instinctively dreaded this man, who had mingled with the tragedy at Trigavou from the very opening scenes. She feared that he had made some discovery, and was expressly come to talk about it. Yet better still to face such a thorny interview than to let Dr. Avangour speak freely alone with Vivette and her lover. So she changed her order into one for his admission.

An instant after he entered, and was much surprised to see Lieutenant Derquy, who merrily saluted him without giving him time to bow to Lady Houlbecq. When he had acquitted himself, like the member of good society that he was, of obligatory courtesies, the physician took a seat between the naval officer and Vivette, in face of the baroness, who uneasily observed him. He was less negligently dressed than in the exercise of his functions in the country, and appeared rather stylish in his overcoat. But Lady Houlbecq fancied he looked more grave than usual, and she foresaw that he brought vexatious news.

"Charmed to see you," she said as graciously as she could. "Such a pleasure is rare here."

"It's true I do not come here often," he answered, bowing. "I have had to run up on a professional call—a medical congress."

The baroness breathed again.

"I wished to profit by the chance to offer my homage, my lady, and also to acquit myself of a commission forced upon me."

"A commission from whom?" inquired Lady Houlbecq.

"From Plaintel, the notary of Dinan."

"Eh, what's the matter now?" murmured the baroness, who had expected any other name than this.

"I would like you to believe that I would not have had anything to do with it if Plaintel had not actually compelled me."

"So it is a disagreeable charge?"

"Not for everybody here present. Plaintel insisted that you would rather learn it through me than by an official notification."

"Whatever it is he is right, I dare say. Well, speak out, as you may before my sister and our next-of-kin, Lieutenant Derquy."

"Well, my lady, the general made a will which revoked the previous one, and constitutes his sole legatee Mdlle. Viviane de Bourbriac before us."

"Peacocks' feathers and yellow buttons!" ejaculated Derquy. "Here's my cousin a millionaire; my dream has 'gone from my gaze like a beautiful'—gazelle! If we marry now, everybody will say I did it for her money-bags."

The baroness had dwelt no more on the threat overhanging her since her husband had written in her presence to the solicitor at Dinan At first she had expected to be disinherited, but, as she received no intimation, she had gradually grown encouraged. The blow was, therefore, only the heavier to receive. And, nevertheless, she felt almost relieved on learning that the news was only the loss of an inheritance. She had feared much worse. But she was not insensible to the discomfiture, for she was reduced to a pittance just when she dreamt of a golden existence abroad. Still she had enough self-command to dissimulate her vexation.

"My husband was the master in the disposal of his fortune," she remarked, coldly.

"Exception is made of the sum acknowledged yours in the marriage contract," rejoined the doctor. "That remains your ladyship's, everything else to the contrary notwithstanding."

"I knew that, but it is of no consequence. I regret nothing since it is my dear sister takes all in my stead."

"Then you imagine that I am going to accept?' exclaimed Vivette. "I shall fling this will into the fire."

"Hurrah!" cheered Derquy, clapping his hands like a boy

"She's a girl all heart," thought the medical gentleman.

"But I shall not accept the sacrifice!" returned the baroness, carried away by an outburst of wrath and pride.

"I shall force you to it, dear," was Vivette's smiling rejoinder. "I shall write for the will and tear it up under your eyes."

"It is only in plays, my child, that legal documents are thus annulled," remarked Dr. Avangour, "and in any case Plaintel cannot show it you, at least at present; it is no longer in his hands."

"What do you mean by his letting it go?" inquired Derquy. "I always thought that a lawyer stuck to papers like wax."

"Certainly. Deposits at a solicitor's are inviolable, just as letters are; but in some cases an order of the bench can seize letters under transmission by the post."

"I do not see the analogy."

"It is strikingly clear, though. On hearing of the general's murder, a couple of hours after writing his will, Plaintel held it his duty to inform the high court that this will was in his keeping, whereupon he was ordered to communicate the settlements the baron had made *in extremis*, so to say."

"I am as much at sea as before."

"But it is quite simple. It is rather natural to suppose that the crime had an interested motive, and that some one knowing the purport of the testament, had killed General Houlbecq in order the sooner to benefit by the advantages it assured him."

"My sister, you mean?" queried the baroness, ironically.

"No one ever thought of suspecting this young lady," replied the doctor, quickly.

"Still less to suspect me, I hope. My husband took good care not to tell me what he was writing under my eyes, but had he done so my interest would have been for him to live as long as possible."

"Consequently justice does not aim at your ladyship. It is now demonstrated that the general's murder was in revenge. Still a copy of the will has been officially made to show to the jury, and the original deed remains in the custody of the court till the trial is over. That is why the solicitor cannot show it, or send it to any one till later. So he begged me to explain how things stood."

"Well?" asked Vivette, "though I cannot destroy it, can I not renounce profiting by it?"

"To be sure you can!"

"That will be enough for me."

Derquy could not help wafting a kiss to the noble girl who preferred sisterly friendship and her lover's esteem above riches. As the doctor looked astonished at this familiar token of approbation, he said, eyeing Vivette in the face—

"Oh, we are betrothed, doctor."

Though the girl was not completely decided on the point, she did not protest against the assertion as premature.

"Now I know all about it, and am set at ease," went on the lieutenant. "But you were speaking of revenge, doctor. Whom had the old boy offended? He was rough as oak bark, but he was incapable of hurting anybody seriously."

"Not even a servant, sir. He bullied them now and then, but he liked them as children would have been liked, had he any. Yet, the man accused was in his service."

"Then I dare say I know him."

"You have certainly seen him at the castle. The younger of the two gamekeepers—Pierre Calorguen."

"The old soldier. Do they dare suspect him? It's a great shame! He worshipped his leader, and I'd answer for the brave fellow as for myself."

"Still, the charges press very heavily against him. He was seen lying in wait near the scene of the crime—at the very time—and seen to run away, and one of his gun charges was found to be recently fired. Serious points!"

"A fig for your points! Calorguen is innocent, and whoever accuses him lies. I say, cousin," he proceeded, suddenly turning to Vivette, "isn't this the man you wanted saved?"

"It is."

"Good! We are both in the same boat, putting forth, and I'll vouch for success."

Dr. Avangour was going to offer some objections when Lady Houlbecq intervened. The conversation put her on the rack, and she had only supported it from wanting to learn what the doctor thought of her visit to Calorguen's before the gendarmes came; but seeing that he shunned so delicate a subject, she dared not bring it forward before her sister and her cousin. She sighed to be alone, to recover from her emotions and ponder over the new condition in which her husband's will placed her.

"Gentlemen," said she abruptly, "you are speaking of matters which torture me, and I beg you again to change the subject. I really need a rest."

"I have nothing more to do than take my leave," said the doctor, rising. "I shall be back in Dinan before the week is over. If I can be of any use here or there, pray command me."

"I thank you, sir. But I am no longer interested in what goes on there. You can tell the notary that I would like him to send any further communications to Mdlle. de Bourbriac, as the sole legatee of General Houlbecq."

Vivette wished to protest anew, but Derquy checked her with a glance. He thought it wisest to leave the sisters to fight it out alone, and said—

"My dear Flavia, you might let me go away with the doctor. I abridge my call, but I shall look in again to-morrow. I carry away enough happiness to last me over twenty-four hours."

This tag of the speech was for Vivette, who was almost as much pleased with it as with the disinterestedness he had shown in approving her resolve to annul the testament. Then the lieutenant went out with the doctor.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### "WHEN YOU SEE THE DOG THE MASTER IS NOT FAR OFF"

WHEN the young officer and Avangour reached the foot of the staircase, the former took his arm, saying—

"My dear doctor, what a good wind blew you in at my cousin's just when I was there. In the first place, I am glad to see you again, for I have the pleasantest recollection of our long chats of old. Besides, I cannot make out clearly what happened in the country—I am floundering about in an unmapped sea, like a submarine boat. Do enlighten me, and I shall not take my hold off, now I grasp you. Where are you going?"

"To my hotel in Helder Street."

"Just in the nick! I am stopping at the Grand Hotel, and was going there. We can go in convoy—I mean together."

"Superfluous explanation," said Dr. Avangour. "I was born on the shore, and, consequently, know a few sea terms. I ask nothing better than your company, but I am not prepared to supply useful information, for I do not see much clearer than you into this lamentable murder of the general. Murder it evidently is, but by whom committed? Maybe by that keeper, though I still doubt, in spite of law. Why was he killed? That is what nobody yet has puzzled out."

"Not even you, doctor!"

"Not even I, though I have never ceased to think it over. There is an old popular axiom—'Look out for the woman!' and I am still looking for the woman."

"I suppose Calorguen has not married since I left France?"

" No, he has not even a betrothed, and no sister. As for the general, he had never been a terror to the girls of the estate ; quite an exemplary husband. Therefore, admitting that Calorguen killed him, it would not be to avenge any wrong done the girl he loved."

" And looking on the other side of the question, it is hard to believe that this blade was enamoured of my cousin."

The doctor knew much more than the speaker on this head, but he had the sense to say nothing, not liking to make a confidant of the baroness's future brother-in-law.

" Then it's not Calorguen," went on Derquy.

" I hope not, for I am much interested in him."

" Then who the deuce is it ?"

"That's the point ! None know, and perhaps none ever will, so that the poor lad runs a great risk of being condemned by the jury."

" And that will delay my cousin Vivette becoming my wife——"

" Even if she renounces a splendid bequest ?" observed Avangour gently.

" In renouncing it she does what I would have counselled her if she had consulted me. But, that will coming up again ; can you explain to me why the general has disinherited his wife ?"

" No more than I can explain the rest. The couple always lived on the best of terms, apparently a most united pair. What is more strange is that the general wrote it only a few hours before the bullet split his heart. And he sent a rider with it to his solicitor at Dinan. It looks as if he foresaw his approaching end."

" It is highly extraordinary. But tell me, is there no motive expressed in these last lines ?"

" There are not many over a dozen lines in all, and they contain nothing but the one legacy for Mdlle. de Bourbriac, quite enough for her to take all."

" No, since she gives up the idea of profiting by a whim of poor old Houlbecq. He was very hasty, and, after an altercation with his lady, he no doubt dashed off the deed *ab irato*, in his ire, but would certainly have annulled it if he had survived."

The doctor shook his head, seeming to be of another mind than the optimist officer.

The two in chatting had descended Friedland Avenue and had reached the corner of Faubourg St. Honore.

"So this unfortunate Calorguen is in Dinan jail?"

"In solitary confinement, too. I asked leave to see him, but I was refused."

"If they refused you, they will not pass me. Yet I would have liked to hear his tale."

"Oh, the restriction will be soon removed, for the preliminary inquiry is about closed. Squire Miniac told me lately that the decree for the trial at the chief court would be issued before the close of the month by the Rennes Court of Appeal, and that the accused would be brought up at the assizes next month."

"The deuce! I have no time to waste if I mean to attempt to prove his innocence."

"I doubt you will manage, but anyhow, one may hope so long as the verdict is not given. Unhappily there is one crushing bit of evidence against Pierre—that of one Jean Baptiste Pillemer, who all but saw him fire the gunshot."

"Pillemer—who's he?"

Instead of answering the question the doctor stopped suddenly and stared at a passing man on the other side of the way, coming in the opposite direction.

"The saying is true," muttered Dr. Avangour. "Speak of the devil and he's sure to appear—but Pillemer in Paris! this is queer."

"What!" cried Derquy, "is this the witness who accuses Calorguen, that kind of ploughman in his Sunday clothes who passes there? He does not look like a townsman in the least."

"He is a thorough Breton," returned the doctor, in a low voice. "He is a farmer half-a-dozen miles from Trigarvou, at the Hunaudaie, and I should like to know what brings him to town."

"I have a mind to stop him to ask why he intends mischief to poor Calorguen."

"You would act very wrong. He would get it about that you had tried to influence him. But I am curious to know where he is going."

"Are you? Well, doctor, we need only follow him."

"I do not know if that is prudent. He may catch sight of us, and if he should——"

"Let's try. I engage to chase him without his seeing us. There he goes round the corner. Come on, my dear fellow!"

Avangour let himself be drawn away, and arm in arm they remounted Friedland Avenue. The rustic had turned to the right towards the Haussmann Boulevard. He walked rather slowly, and often stopped, like a stranger who feared to go wrong. But he kept the lead and did not bother about any one behind him.

"You see there is no danger," resumed Derquy. "Let us lock step with him at a convenient distance, and on the way tell me why this clown's presence in Paris seems suspicious."

"That's not precisely the word. Only he never goes up, and I am more astonished to see him when he might be called at any moment before a court of inquiry. The owner of Hunaudaie lives in Paris in the winter, it is true, but he has been out of the way this month, and it is said down our part that he is dead."

"What is the name of that landowner?"

"You know him very well. It is the Count of Trigavou."

"Alain! Why, we were thick in the old times. And, indeed, I was shocked this morning to hear that he was believed dead. His housekeeper said so, and the news took me aback. My cousins know it now, too."

"It is not so certain that he is dead, though his disappearance is alarming. What does Lady Houlbecq think of it?"

"She appears quite afflicted, and her sister too. I shall console myself with difficulty at the loss of a friend, for, whatever you or my cousin Flavia say, I no longer hope to see him."

"Eh, does her ladyship doubt?"

"It struck me so. She never saw the count save in winter in society, for he came but rarely to the castle, whither the general did not try to entice him."

"He may have been jealous of him."

"I don't believe that. Still, though, there's some sense in it, for Trigavou was a winning card, whilst poor Houlbecq had dreadfully aged since marriage; and, between ourselves, was not always amiable, particularly towards my lady. But my cousin is virtue itself to the tips of her nails." As the doctor said never a word, Derquy added: "Was she ill-spoken of?"

"Not openly. But you know there are slanderers and libellers everywhere. They will pass comments, and the general's tragic death set all tongues a-wagging."

"I suppose they do not accuse his widow of having him killed?"

"Oh, no. But when it is generally known that his will cuts her off they will give full cry again."

"I'll silence some of the hounds!"

"Then you have made up your mind to go down there?"

"I shall go if my cousin wishes it."

"Lady Houlbecq will be compelled, I fear, to appear in the Assize Court."

"So will I appear. Ha! there's our man stopping to read the name-board at the corner of Teheran Street, as if he were astray."

"Very likely, and if he should retrace his steps he'd infallibly run up against us. Now, I am very much set on his not seeing me, and will, therefore, give up this chase. But he does not know you, and nothing bars you from seeing it out. I advise you, though, not to accost him. He's as cunning as a fox, and will mistrust you."

"I will content myself with following him. And when I house him I shall have safe ground to start from. I do not clearly see what this will bring us too, but still——"

"He's going to turn! I shall come around to the Grand Hotel to-morrow to hear how the adventure turned out, my dear sir."

So saying the doctor wheeled and went his way, keeping close to the houses.

Derquy believed he could not do better than stick to the man-hunt, whilst conforming to Dr. Avangour's advice for him to act with prudence. He began to like the fun, and thought to himself it was good apprenticeship before he took up the chase of the assassin in order to demonstrate the innocence of Vivette's "ward."

The farmer of the Hunaudaie was still at fault before the street sign-board, hesitating to go down Teheran Street, and Derquy had ample time to study him. This peasant was clothed like a townsman, but he appeared constrained in the unaccustomed suit, and his bearing and face were not altered. Thick-set, broad-shouldered, with a square face enframed in red whiskers, he looked more like a sailor than a farmer, but he "went over the edge" of the disguise, as policemen say of an evil-looking passer-by.

He did not notice the naval officer, who was slowly approaching, but he applied to a working man, no doubt to ask his road, for Derquy, quickening his pace, caught the answer—"To get to Monceau Park? Why, go up to Teheran Street—to Messina Avenue, and on to the end, when you will see the park gate before you."

The farmer thanked the man, and started in the denoted direction, when Derquy grazed him as he came by. He thought himself extremely sharp in going up Teheran Street with the lead, reasoning—"He will never guess thus that I am following him. Every now and again I will glance over my shoulder to see how he is coming on, and I cannot miss him, now I know whither he is bound."

He forgot that no craft can be well done without some experience. He was still in the 'prentice stage as a "shadow," and he was soon obliged to confess that nothing in this difficult pursuit can make up for unenjoyed practice. The first time he looked behind him he saw that the Breton, instead of proceeding, had halted in the mouth of the street.

" He seems to distrust himself," grumbled the naval officer. " Can he chance to remember me from having seen me at Trigavou ? It's likely, for I thought his displeasing phiz had come athwart my eyes before, probably near the castle."

An empty cab was crawling along, to the driver of which Pillemer beckoned. It stopped, and in jumped the countryman, after giving an address which Lieutenant Derquy could not hear at a distance, and the vehicle rolled up the Haussmann Boulevard, carrying away the farmer and his secret.

"Oh, he must have recognized me," growled Vivette's betrothed. " Here I am landed like a greenhorn after a trial trip. Nice of me, ain't it ? This will teach me to leave police duty alone. There may be good sport in dodging a man when one is gifted that way, but there's none of the vocation in my sea-pie. Anyway, I don't reckon to have squeezed much out of this turnip-cutter. Still, I should like to know what he wanted in Monceau Park—to meet some one ? A countryman does not go into gardens to stroll among flowers."

After reflection he concluded that the only course open to him was to transport himself to the park, where he might be lucky enough to find Pillemer anew, who was, perchance, going round about in the hackney coach to throw pursuers off the scent. Derquy was in nowise pressed, and he could not hope to overtake Dr. Avangour now.

So he went on to Messina Avenue, and all the way to the gilded gates visible at the end of Ruysdael Avenue.

The doctor's remarks floated in his brain, and entangled his own idea ; he tried to solve their enigmatical sense. Ordinarily frank, Dr. Avangour's language had been full of reticence, and cleared up nothing ; he neither denied nor affirmed Calorguen's innocence nor the baroness's virtue. In this scepticism there was much to shake Olivier's father though supported by Vivette's categorical declarations, the keeper's guilt not being admissible by her any more than Lady Houlbecq's complicity. But our seaman was not one to give up a generous design. He went straight on without thinking any more of the doctor's opinions.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DROPPING A TORCH IN A KEG OF POWDER

ARRIVED in Monceau Park, Lieutenant Derquy set to exploring it in every way—no small affair, as the park is pretty large and crossed by numberless paths. In summer it is full of idlers, nursemaids and children, and to look for a human needle in that haystack were summer madness indeed. But there is no mob in winter, and though it was fine weather, most of the seats were unoccupied and there were few promenaders.

There was only required good eyes to spy the man, and our lieutenant had excellent ones. But the question was if the farmer of the Hunaudaie would come at all, and which way as there are three or four different entrances. Instead of standing guard at any one of these, it were assuredly better to wander about where the lawn alternated with shrubbery. Through the main road vehicles came, and Pillemer might even cross without getting out of the cab he had taken.

To begin with, Derquy examined this east and west road, but in its sweeps he met nobody but nursemaids and their charges. Then he perceived a bridge over an artificial brook, and went upon its arched back, whence he commanded the beds and clumps. In this well chosen spot he waited like a wild fowler for the game.

Behind him rose a colonnade around a sheet of water, a sham ruin imitating the remains of a Grecian temple, a sad and damp place, where no one strolls even in the brightest season.

But one gentleman was lounging here, with his hands in his ulster pockets and its collar turned up, no doubt to keep off the chill. He stamped round the lake like a man impatient, or with cold feet, or both.

"There's a person who looks as if keeping an appointment," mused Derquy. "A lady of course, though I don't know; it might be a man more naturally this weather—why not Pillemer? Anyway, I have a strong mind to view him closer to learn if he is an acquaintance."

Without further deliberation, the naval officer descended from his observatory, noiselessly reached the colonnade, and made the circuit of the lakes, but not in the same direction as the lounger, so that they came face to face. Both stopped short.

"Thunder! is it you?" ejaculated Derquy, stupefied. "How happy I am to see you! I can hardly believe my eyes. I heard you were dead!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied the other curtly. "I do not know you, and I do not understand your talk."

"Can I be wrong?" muttered the lieutenant, examining the speaker. "But no," he resumed, almost instantly, "I am not mistaken. You are Count Alain of Trigavou."

"That is so, but, I repeat, I am not aware to whom I have the honour of speaking."

"Well, I never expected that my campaign in China would change me so that one of my old friends would not recognise me. It is true that I am wearing all my beard, but still, dear boy, take a hard look at me. Don't you recall the naval officer you introduced to your club four years ago?"

"What, are you——"

"Derquy—Olivier Derquy."

"Oh, my friend, many excuses! I so little expected to meet a man here whom I believed to be in the depths——"

"Of the sea," added the other, laughing.

"Lord, no! of the Far East. How happy I am, too, to see you!" cried Trigavou, shaking Olivier's hand effusively. "How long have you been home?"

"Only since yesterday in Paris."

"And I only came back this morning."

"That explains why, when I called at your place in Miromesnil Street yesterday, I was told that there had come no news from you in a month."

"And did they conclude that I was dead?"

"Indeed they did. My cousins, too, believed so, and wore mourning for you."

"Lady Houlbecq and her sister are really too kind, and I am eager to learn how that idea got afloat that I would go hence without taking my leave of them."

"They knew that you had left the Hunaudaie farm suddenly, and nobody had seen you since. In Brittany it was thought some misfortune had befallen you. Dr. Avangour for one was convinced of that."

"The Dinan doctor! Have you seen him?"

"Just left him? I met him at my cousin's."

"Really these dull dogs among the cabbage-heads have too much imagination. What! because a man pleases to absent himself without leaving word where he goes, people amuse themselves by spreading reports of his death! It's really too absurd."

"I grant it, but it also shows that you have friends who fret about you. They alarmed themselves mistakenly, for here you are alive. All is for the best. Only I ought to undeceive Lady Houlbecq and her sister about your fate. Now I think of it, their house in Friedland Avenue is not two steps. Will you come around with me? What a sensation! They'll take you for a ghost!"

"I don't care to frighten them. And besides, between ourselves, I cannot leave this spot. I am waiting for somebody."

"Ahem! a lady?"

"Label it as you please, my dear Olivier!"

"Good; I understand. You have been courting her this month. Now I see why you let nobody hear from you."

"But I have not been in hiding, only travelling."

"Incog., eh? That's much the same thing. Pursuing the bella donna from town to town? You are in the true course, for there is nothing half so sweet in life as pursuing love's young dream. But I am awfully in your way, of course, and so I'll sheer off. I'll go around alone to my cousin's and promise your early call."

"No, no. Pray stay, my friend. I am too soon for my appointment, and so we have time for a little parley. You know that the old baron went off rather tragically?"

"Alas, yes! Never did any event surprise me more."

"I left the Hunaudaie on the very eve, learning of the lamentable occurence by the newspapers, and I only know what was said at first. How does Lady Houlbecq bear her affliction?"

"Profoundly afflicted she is, and she cannot bear her husband's death to be spoken of. Her sister feels much sorrow, too, and is all the more saddened because a man is accused of the crime who interests her, and me also—a game-keeper who was in the heavy horse under the general—Pierre Calorguen. You must have seen him down there."

"Very likely. Do they know why he killed his master?"

"Mdlle. de Bourbriac asserts that he never did, and I agree with her. I may even tell you that I perhaps am going to Trigavou to try to collect favourable testimony for the man. My cousin Vivette has asked me to help and defend him. Before I actually set out, I shall ask you for particulars about people there, whom you know better than I. And I will keep you cognisant of my doings, for I hope we shall see one another often!"

"I hope so, too. I am going to resume my winter life in the same quarter, and we can meet every day at the club."

"That's a settled arrangement. And we shall also meet at Lady Houlbecq's when I get back from Brittany."

"When are you off?"

"I hardly know, depending as it does on what my cousin decides. I have placed myself at her beck and call. But it will probably be soon, as this unfortunate Calorguen appears at the assizes next month, and we have no time to lose in his behalf. But, by the way, do you know that the bitterest witness against him is your farmer at the Hunaudaie——"

"Pillemer? How should I know that? I left two days before the crime: I arrived here this morning, and during my stay away I have held no correspondence—whether you believe me or not—with this honest fellow, who does not know how to write well. Anyway, I do not comprehend how he gets entangled with the affair. The Hunaudaie is a good bit from the castle, and Pillemer generally sticks to his farm."

"Does he? Ha, ha! He's in Paris at this very speaking."

"Impossible!"

"I have just met him."

"Why you don't know him!"

"Well, I don't; but Dr. Avangour pointed him out to me.

"Some error of the doctor's. Pillemer has never come to the city. I have not called him, and if, on some next to impossible errand, here he is, without my leave and without notifying me, I should have seen him already, for he has my address, of course."

"He did not find you there, and he is hunting after you. I heard him inquire of a passer-by for Monceau Park."

"That's too rich! Pillemer never in all his life heard of Monceau Park."

"Your housekeeper may have told him you were here."

"My housekeeper! Do you fancy that I let him into my confidence about the trysts I have?"

"True! My supposition has no sense in it; and, in any case, it is no business of mine whom this Pillemer is looking for."

"I repeat to you, my dear boy, that it can't be Pillemer. Dr. Avangour has gone wrong."

"I begin to believe so, and that I did not hear aright. If the man whom the doctor took for your farmer intended to be driven to this park I should have seen him in the half-hour I have been looking about. But I am not sorry for the wild goose chase he's led me, since I have found you. Yet

I would never have been here if I had not met him at the corner of Friedland Avenue and the Faubourg St. Honoré."

"You followed him?"

"I own up, and that I am very stupid. But if I had known that you were not dead (heaven be praised!) I should not have been such a fool. Instead of following the man I should have asked you straight what you thought of him."

"I can think only well of him. He was on the farm in my father's time. He has made money, and might have lived independent, but has remained faithful to me whilst I am under a cloud. He takes care of my little property, and acts as my serving-man. I have entire trust in him, and he deserves it."

"Incapable of bearing false witness, then?"

"Totally! and I must add that I do not know of his having any ill-will towards the baron's gamekeeper. However, I suppose I shall be running down to the Hunaudaie one of these days, when I shall question Pillemer and make him thoroughly confess, and I will give you an account of the examination."

Whilst conversing, the gentlemen had sauntered away from the colonnade around the ornamental water. Derquy fully perceived that the count did not want the lady he expected to find him in colloquy with a stranger. Frequently Trigavou turned, no doubt to see if she was coming.

Thus they got to the Malesherbes Boulevard entrance and the main road coming to it. The lieutenant saw a cab rattling up the middle of this road, and at the window the face of the rustic he had seen get into it at the corner of Teheran Street. "There he is!" he muttered, squeezing the count's arm.

"Who? My farmer?"

"Yes; yonder, in that cab."

Trigavou looked, but the man had dropped back under cover, and the vehicle rushed past.

"I had no time to see him, but I suppose he had plenty to see us," remarked the nobleman.

"Oh, plenty!"

"Then it is not Pillemer, for he would have stopped to speak. But in order to be still more sure that it is not he, you can run after the cab," continued Trigavou merrily. "It's not flying, and you can easily overtake it."

"My dear fellow, you have reason to laugh at me," returned Derquy, gaily as well. "That is some compensation for my having bored you with my whims and assertions. It's all that fault of the doctor's seething in my brain. He must have a beam in his eye to take some suburban market-gardener for a chawbacon. But let it drop; go back to your appointment, and excuse my keeping you so long."

"There's no harm done since my party has not turned up yet. I am lucky."

"I believe you are. But you'll not be kept long, and it is useless for me to be seen detaining you. I shall run on to Lady Houlbecq's."

"To tell her you have seen me?"

"Certainly. She would never forgive my concealing so happy an encounter."

"Oh, I should soon have paid her my respects, but that need not prevent you trumpeting my resurrection. Only I shall be obliged by your not mentioning that you caught me hanging round a tree in Monceau Park like a hobbledehoy waiting in Love Lane for a sweetheart."

"What do you take me for, my dear Alain? I beg you to believe that I know how to hold sacred a friend's confidence as regards a love affair. Now, when do I see you again?"

"To-morrow, if you like, at the club, five to six. What do you say to dinner? I am not free now, and I do not ask you around to my lodgings during the day, for I may be out. Lots to do after a month's absence, of course."

After a cordial shake of the hand the two friends separated. The Count of Trigavou sauntered back to his old post by the lake, where he said his guiding star would soon appear, and Lieutenant Derquy strode off towards Houlbecq House.

He was enchanted at finding a pleasant companion again who might serve him in his plans, but he stormed at the hastiness of Dr. Avangour. He even wondered if the doctor did sincerely interest himself about Calorguen. He doubted it, almost as much as his own right, and he reckoned on the Count of Trigavou being a sharper and more devoted ally in the campaign undertaken to rescue the ward of Vivette de Bourbriac.

Assuredly Olivier would never have been of this way of thinking had he known that this winning gentleman was the paramour of Lady Houlbecq, and had also flirted with Mdlle. de Bourbriac, but Olivier was fresh from China, and had not the faintest suspicion of what went on at the castle once he sailed the seas. On reaching the house in Friedland Avenue he considered it useless to see his cousins to tell them that their country neighbour was in good health. He pencilled a few words on his visiting card for the footman to carry it immediately to his lady, and thereupon he walked away, delighted to be the first to give such happy intelligence to the two sisters.

Little did he forecast the effects it would produce.

Without knowing it, and with no such intention, he had simply dropped a torch in the keg of powder.

# CHAPTER XX

## OUT OF THE TOMB INTO THE SUNLIGHT

THE Count of Trigavou, believed by so many to be dead, had never enjoyed better health, and readily assumed his old mode of life, modest as it was, in accordance with his limited income.

With twelve thousand francs a year, a man is not rich in Paris, even though he spends six months annually in the country. He is almost poor if his birth and relations oblige him to go much into society.

Alain was thus situated, for he lived up to his rank among the millionnaires. But he knew how to regulate his existence.

In the first place, as he spent hardly anything during his stay at the Hunaudaie, his twelve thousand francs became equal to twenty thousand for the winter months. He belonged to a fashionable club, where he dined in superior style at a very moderate price, when he did not dine out in opulent mansions, where he was frequently invited. He never gambled, or at least played whist and often won. He threw away no money on female notorieties. He kept no carriage, and no gentleman's gentleman. He had a lodging in Miromesnil Street, comfortably furnished, with the house porter as his man of all work.

His only luxury was a saddle-horse, which he kept out at livery, and took down to the country to be turned out to grass.

By his example he proved a well-known truth, namely—that a knowing and experienced man can live on the best in a great city for very little outlay.

After his month's absence, which had obliterated him from the list of the living among his friends of both sexes, quick to take alarm, and even by his faithful housekeeper, Trigavou had re-installed himself with much pleasure in his rooms, and had not quitted his fireside by three p.m. on the second day after his stroll in Monceau Park. He remained indoors because he expected a caller, for he did not doubt that the good-hearted Olivier would hasten to announce to the baroness the resurrection of her country neighbour.

Lady Houlbecq, before widowhood, never came to her lover's house.

Equally prudent, they made it a rule never to expose themselves to a surprise, and always to deprive themselves of meetings in Paris, whatever it cost them. They made up for it in summer time at the castle, where the general was much less on the alert, and hardly watched his wife. In this he resembled most husbands, who always see danger where there is none.

Now Flavia was free, completely free. The world had watched her when she went into mourning, but nobody now busied about a woman who had remained plunged in grief without giving hold for the lightest criticism. Trigavou's disappearance had prevented Flavia compromising herself, and now allowed her to renew, after a month's abstention, without peril, her relations with the bewailed gallant.

He reckoned on this, and all his thoughts and deeds since the disaster tended to prepare for them a durable happiness which naught should trouble hereafter.

The moment had come.

On receiving Derquy's card overnight announcing the blissful event, Flavia had nearly choked with emotion. But then joy does not kill, and she had managed to contain herself so as carefully to keep from Vivette the news that the Count of Trigavou still lived, and that she expected to see him a day or two hence. She could not let her servants remark her going forth after dark for the first time after her arrival in town. Again, Olivier's pencilled lines had given no details; they ran on the visiting card—"Alain of Trigavou has returned. I have seen him."

By running straightway to Miromesnil Street, Lady Houlbecq ran a risk of finding no one at home. She knew the count's habits; that he breakfasted about noon, and dawdled about over a cigar. At one she quitted her residence, telling her sister she was going to profit by the fine weather to take a stroll in the Champs Elysées. On her way she took a cab for Trigavou's lodgings.

He himself opened to her ring. He expected her, and showed that he did by losing no time in asking her questions or furnishing any information.

Instead of exchanging vain words, they prattled of the present and forgot the sorrows of the past, and paid no heed to the uncertainty of the future. But ardent as they may be, transports come down to earth from the seventh heaven, and they found themselves hand in hand, looking into one another's eyes, as at the castle on the gloomy night when Baron Houlbecq cut short their villainous colloquy. The same remembrance struck them both, and nothing more was needed to spring the questions out upon their lips.

"At last I shall learn what happened at Trigavou after our abrupt separation," said the lover.

"Now, what have you done all this month? Why did you give me no token of life?"

Each was trying to draw the other out.

"I could not write you," rejoined the count. "I feared my letter would fall into other hands than yours. At first I was ignorant your husband was killed, and feared you were under close ward. When a little later I read the newspapers announcing the event, I also read that the investigation was begun, so I played the dead lest I injured you. As soon as the police take up a matter, extreme prudence becomes the golden rule. Had I written you, some allusion to our adventure must have crept in, and the mere seizure of my letter in the post would have got us both in a pinch. I quickly understood that in our mutual interest I ought to dive under if only for a time. I did it, and I do not repent it, for we are now in a lovely situation. No one saw me enter the castle or go out on St. Hubert's Night. No one knows or even suspects we love one another. Hence no astonishment will be aroused at your receiving me. As for those curious to know what became of me since General Houlbecq's death, my reply is ready without any need to lie. I went to Scotland and stayed with a laird, one of my friends, who can testify to it, if my word is doubted."

"Now, is this true, really true?"

"What! Do you yourself doubt it? Do you imagine I've been hiding in some other tower, under the care of some other lady of a castle! Tut, tut! You know well enough I have loved none but you, and I love you more than ever since you have undergone so much for me."

"Forgive me, Alain, dear! I am mad to accuse you, but how can I help it when I was so miserable? And I have always been jealous, you remember."

"So am I jealous, too," said Alain, smiling. "If ever you give me cause to believe a rival——"

"Hush!" ejaculated the baroness, closing his mouth with a kiss.

"Oh, I am glad to believe it not. But I warn you I shall look out. Now, to speak seriously. You did not answer my query on what occurred after you pushed me out into the tower chamber. I listened at the door to your tyrant roaring his intention to camp down in your rooms and not leave you. I had no trouble guessing that he meant to blockade me, so as to force me to show myself."

"You must have also heard the hammer at work under his order for some roofers to fasten a sheet of metal over the condemned door."

"No. Oh, ho! he wanted to box me up and starve me to death?"

"Just so."

"Then he was more ferocious and more cowardly than I fancied. Decidedly he merited what befel him. But, tell me, has not that metal plate been moved since the fatal shot?"

"I would have torn it down myself if I had been left alone, but Dr. Avangour came in upon me. The general had called him over from Dinan on the pretext that I was unwell. He arrived the very moment when my husband fell, and he was the first to pronounce his death certain. Then came Justice Miniac. It is possible he supposed a man was in the tower, for he had the plate immediately taken off."

"In your presence?"

"Yes, I stood by, more dead than alive."

"How you must have been amazed to find the hole empty?"

"I was so terrified that I dropped in a swoon."

"I hope, when you came to, you never told them why you were so deeply affected?"

"Not I. Besides, nobody asked me. It was thought my powers were exhausted after so many shocks."

"Very lucky. And what did my darling Flavia think of that miraculous disappearance?"

"Nothing. I remained unconscious a full hour, and when I recovered my senses I believed I had the nightmare. Later, I was led to think you had perished in seeking safety."

"Then you guessed the hole had an outlet? There was one indeed, known to me since I was a boy—a rat's run in the hollow of the thick wall. Nobody ever found it and nobody will, though only one of the stones has to be moved, but you have to know the right one."

"Others do know it. The burrow runs down to the foot of the tower, where the opening was walled up some five years ago. I believed you descended this well, and——"

Pooh! catch me sliding down that no-thoroughfare! I would never have got out. On the contrary, I climbed up. The wall is bored from the foundation stone to the turret, and the perpendicular tunnel used to have two egresses—one below, stopped up, and one above, still free. By climbing like a chimney sweep, I reached the conical roof covering the old platform of the tower. The rest was a trifle. In the roof is a skylight, and the ivy has grown up to there—that blessed ivy which so often served as my ladder to reach your window."

"This time it helped you flee. And I believed you lost. Had I but known——"

"You may well believe that I did not go to sleep on the road. Twenty minutes after your husband's popping in on us I had landed in the grounds. I stole along the wall to the breach you know about, and thence flew straight to the Hunaudaie, which I reached in an hour and a half. Of course my farmer, Pillemer, was asleep, and I would not wake him. I had worn my considering-cap on the way, and my course was taken. I went up to my room, filled my pockets with a hundred napoleons I always keep in a desk for sudden emergencies, and shot off again. I reached Dinard easily before peep of day, for you know I am a good walker. There I took the first boat for St. Malo. By ten I was aboard the Southampton steamship, and on the next evening but one I was in London. What a good thing I went! My stay in Brittany would have been on thorns, whilst nobody troubled about me in my absence. Anyway, I never foresaw your husband would be killed, and I wanted to play him a trick—let him believe I had died of hunger in the deadly trap, and chuckle over being rid of me, and then confuse him by presenting myself some fine day at the castle to ask him how he was. That ought to have cured him for ever of jealous suspicions—ha, ha! But things have turned out differently, for which I am not sorry, as the obstacles between us exist no more. But I must know how I stand as regards this death. There is a gamekeeper accused and arrested. Did he do it?"

"I do not doubt he did."

"Good! But why assassinate his master? Not to please me, I'll wager, for the man hates me."

"He killed him out of love for me."

# CHAPTER XXI

## A TERRIBLE SWEETHEART

THIS was not the first time that Trigavou's idol had swung from rage to joy, from insults to endearments. Such wicked entanglements as theirs cannot be without quarrels, and the reconciliations are but temporary. But the storms are quickly forgotten, and Flavia was so effusive with happiness that she all but informed her false worshipper of Vivette's generous project to renounce the general's inheritance. Reflection checked her.

To begin with, Vivette might recall her resolution. Besides, the test was not complete. In promising to wed his lady love, Alain had perhaps only yielded to an enthusiastic impulse to be regretted by and by. Best to make sure of the constancy of his sentiments, fortify her power during the period imposed bylaw, and in ten months' time if his tenderness was lasting, reward his perseverance by telling him how she came into her own again against her husband's design, by her sister's kindness.

Lady Houlbecq did not see it was difficult to keep such triumphant tidings long. All she thought of was the still distant bliss of linking her destiny for ever to her adored's and she felicitated herself on having witnessed overnight the betrothal of Vivette, who could not disengage herself whatever might be her regret when she saw Alain of Trigavou again. She could not fail to see him, for it was settled that the count should often come to the Friedland Avenue mansion as a friend. Besides, the unsuspecting Derquy would not be slow to inform his intended of Trigavou's resurrection.

In less time than it takes to write it, Flavia thought of all this, and, amid fondlings, said of a sudden :—

"Now I believe you. You have sworn it under heaven, and if you are a perjurer, heaven will punish you."

The last of the Trigavous had nowise expected to hear the wronged baron's widow call heaven to witness the oath consecrating a shameful amour, but he was sufficiently his master not to smile, and he protested anew against the lingering doubt of his suspicious divinity.

"Cheer up, woman of little faith," said he impiously. "I have always been the pattern for lovers and shall never change. My fidelity will resist time and events. Have you not found that so already? And nothing can come wores than the crisis we have gone through. Now for more troublesome matters. Down there in the Breton country a sword of Damocles is hanging over your head by the finest hair. What shield have you against the danger?"

"I meant to have fled from France, but you oppose it, and as you are my lord and master I shall obey."

"Mark—two men are to be feared——"

"Calorguen and—and——"

"Dr. Avangour."

"Why the doctor?"

"Because he must know many things, and I believe he is set against me. Moreover, there's your sister, before whom you spoke imprudently."

"She will not speak."

"But she will act."

"What can we do as regards her?"

"Nothing. Otherwise I may do considerable."

"How?"

"I must get back the note you wrote. It is clear Calorguen no longer has it. The prison searcher would have found it. Therefore he hid it away before arrest."

"Or entrusted it to somebody?"

"Just so. The puzzle is to light upon the hiding-place or custodian, which I charge myself with."

"Then you mean to go into Brittany—to the Hunaudaie?

"Why not? How natural after a month's touring that I should spend a few days on my little property before settling definitely in town. An excellent way, too, for silencing the scandal-mongers mayhap commenting on my absence. None better than I know the castle, its surroundings, and the country folk of the township. I can make a thorough inquest without any show of it. I shall give Dinan a turn, and if I meet Dr. Avangour find out what he has in his brain."

"And should you meet my sister around Trigavou?"

"Well, I'll bow to her and no more. You cannot expect to conceal that I live, and I hope you are no longer jealous. Besides, she'll not go down to Trigavou alone. Olivier will accompany her. Between ourselves, that is not the correct thing, but since they are to be married——"

"I would it were to-morrow!"

"I have the same wish for it to be over promptly," Alain hastened to say on seeing Lady Houlbecq's countenance darken, for he wished to tranquillize her upon his aim in that quarter. "I dine this evening with Derquy, who will certainly proclaim his approaching nuptials, which I shall urge him to press on. On the same occasion I shall drop a word or two upon my projected excursion—which you do not disapprove, I suppose."

"Would I could do it with you."

"Now, that would be a blunder and no mistake! Were you to set up in the castle again you would attract general attention. It's lucky the public have not troubled about you since the general's death. And if Calorguen learns that you have come down at the same time as I, he's the man to let all out. I shall take my precautions to keep it dark that I have reappeared. But the best thing is to manage his escape, and if our simple Olivier will help me I'll succeed in that."

"When do you intend going?" interrupted the baroness.

"As soon as possible. First I must learn what can be done with Derquy, which will be this evening. About four to morrow you will receive me—a ceremonious visit of condolence.

All the better if your sister be present, for I shall bear myself in such a style that her fancy will fade away. The day after to-morrow we will meet here again to arrange our plan of campaign, to be carried out by myself alone. You remain in Paris whilst I am scouring the plains, but I shall keep you informed upon my operations, for there's no danger now in our writing. Neither of us is mixed up with the case. If the police had wanted to involve you it would have been done before this. I even hope you will be spared the nuisance of giving evidence in the court room. Needless to repeat that the true aim of my trip is to recover your confounded autograph and destroy it."

"Don't hunt for it in Calorguen's cottage. The police have searched it high and low."

"But not all the cottages around ?"

"He lived alone with his old paralyzed mother and a half idiotic child, with no friends among the neighbours and no mates among our servants. I cannot think of anybody he would have confided the writing to. During our interview he told me it was not his mother, as she might have read it."

"By Jove, there's a clue there ! He has chosen some illiterate fellow as guardian—lots of them at Trigavou, I know. I will seek about and I shall find."

"He promised to return me the note, and I believe he would, had not the gendarmes arrested him."

"Therefore, I repeat, he's not going to say anything so long as he is not condemned. If it chances so, he will not be believed were the cursed paper destroyed. Now, if you'll believe me, you'll no longer defer telling your sister I am living. Her intended Olivier will soon be doing it, and she must not be let suppose you were trying to keep the truth back from her. Your interest is to be first in with the news in this race of intelligence. I do not see any inconvenience in her knowing through you that I am off into Brittany to work for her pet. In our complicated situation we ought to play with cards above-board as the only means to win the stakes."

"You are right. And besides, I am eager to see how

Vivette will take the news of your resurrection. If she declares she loves you still and will wed no other——"

"Pooh! you can throw cold water on her by recalling her engagement to her cousin. I even empower you to say that I do not love her."

"Enough! I believe you now."

"A lucky thing."

"How can I help being distrustful when I am jealous? But you see me pacified now. I shall follow your counsel bit by bit, and we together will reach our goal through all obstacles."

"Union is strength," observed Alain, returning the embrace of his terrible goddess.

The reconciliation was complete, and the interview finished as it had commenced. Flavia, full of happiness and intoxicated with hope, tore herself away and returned to the mansion, where her sister awaited her.

# CHAPTER XXII

## HER MOST DANGEROUS RIVAL

LADY HOULBECQ took a cab to reach her residence the sooner, and went straight on entering into the little sitting-room where Vivette passed her evenings. There she found her needle-working by the fireside as usual, and no more gay than on the eve. The guilty woman should have felt a twinge of conscience at this calm scene of domestic life, after her trip to the garden of forbidden fruit. She should have envied the maid who, thrusting aside a hopeless lover decided to wed an honourable man for whom she only yet entertained a warm friendship. But the baroness never thought of admiring sacrifices of this sort. Resignation was not her strong point, and her sister's wisdom merely excited her scorn. All she had in her mind was to test the touchstone which the Count of Trigavou advised her to apply to Vivette, and she set to work offhand.

"Has Olivier come while I have been away?" she inquired.

"I do not think so," rejoined the other, without raising her eyes.

"Well, had he come he would have asked to see you."

"I was alone, and I should not have received him."

"Why not? Are you not betrothed?"

"That is rather too strong a word," murmured Mdlle. de Bourbriac.

"Olivier believes so, and on good foundation after your conversation with him yesterday. Changed your mind?"

"No. I have no repugnance to marrying him—later on."

"No repugnance and no eagerness, it strikes me."

"I do not know how to answer you, and I am astonished at your pressing me to explain my sentiments regarding him. I am too much embarrassed to define them. My cousin deserves the love."

"But you do not love him. Is that it?

"I do not think the time has come. I told him so before you, and he accepted the delay."

"He also accepted your strange alliance to go and try to extricate from the grasp of justice the man whom the universal voice accuses of killing my husband. I do not gainsay this, though the fellowship ensuing from this association seems to me passably improper. I forewarn you that, when your enterprise comes to an end, you will have to marry him for your reputation's sake. Society does not allow girls to scamper over mead and lawn for months at a time with a man, even when the man is a cousin."

"You forget I am five-and-twenty."

"What does that matter when he is only thirty? And a naval officer will never pass as a schoolboy. Since you must marry Olivier sooner or later, let it be immediately."

"A month after the death of my brother-in-law! Olivier himself desires nothing of the kind."

"Only because he fears to vex you, but he is not the less vexed himself at having to wait. Between ourselves, it is not handsome on your part to impose so long a probation. You may go back on your determination in a year, and if you do your conduct will be most blamable. Hence I counsel your ending the suspense now, unless you have some hidden resolution."

"What about?"

"Come, come, little sister, don't pretend not to understand me. Yesterday you owned to me that you loved the Count of Trivagou fondly. I fear you have not forgotten him."

"And I never shall, come what may; but he is no more; and my fondness for him becomes a mere remembrance."

"He is said to be dead, but there is no proof. Perhaps you hope to see him again."

"If I had cherished that hope, I would not have deferred Olivier for a year, but refused altogether to marry him."

This declaration made Lady Houlbecq start and comprehend that indirect questions could obtain nothing but incomplete answers.

"So, if the Count of Trigavou were alive," she began.

"I would never marry," replied the other unhesitatingly.

"Oh, but you would—and the partner he ! "

"No. He no more than another. But what pleasure can you find in torturing me thus ? You know well that he is dead."

Flavia, pale to whiteness, looked steadily at the speaker, and abruptly said :

"Alain of Trigavou is alive."

"That's not true ! " cried the other. "You say that to try me."

"He lives, I repeat, and I can swear to it."

"Have you seen him ?"

"Olivier has, yesterday, and he wrote me the happy news. Our poor cousin is delighted to recover a friend, for before he sailed to China he was intimate with our neighbour, and he has never suspected that the count pleased you also. Perhaps he will be less satisfied on learning the tendency of your heart, which he will discover unless you marry him speedily."

Vivette did not protest ; she still doubted.

"No, I cannot credit this," she faltered. "If the count were not dead we should have heard something about him during the month of his disappearance."

"Why so ? " retorted Lady Houlbecq coldly. "He was in Scotland. He has full right to travel incognito. He has no near relatives. To whom, therefore, is he obliged to write ? You did not expect a letter, did you, any more than I ? "

"Certainly not ; still——"

"Or his tenant of the Hunaudaie, or his housekeeper in town ? Still less, you will admit. He does not have to account for his movements to his hired servants. I wonder now how I was so silly as to take as serious the rural chatter of Dr. Avangour and the replies of a porter to that dull-brained Olivier, who ought to kick himself, as I believe the latest slang of our young men has it, for so lightly spreading about a tale of a man whom he ran up against in the street at our very door."

"At our door?" repeated Vivette, mechanically.

"Yes, truly. Paris life is full of such chance meetings. The count came back that very morning, having quitted the Hunaudaie two days before my husband's death, which he read of in Scotland in the papers. He told cousin that he would give us an early call to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Are you going to receive him?"

"Of course; I have no motive to order the doors to be closed on him."

"I shall not see him; I have no wish to see him."

"Are you, then, so little sure of yourself that your fear is great to face him?"

No answer from Vivette, whose silence was equivalent to an avowal. Lady Houlbecq thus took it, and said to herself her sister might be her most dangerous rival. Alain's vows only partly reassured her, and his boastful disinterestedness might melt away if Vivette revoked and accepted the general's splendid bequest. In any event, better not expose Alain to temptation, and the best of all ways to preserve him was to discourage Vivette's secret hopes in order to push her into Cousin Olivier's arms. Lady Houlbecq did not hesitate.

"In fact," she resumed, "you are right to avoid the count, for I see you are not cured of the silly sentiment troubling your brain. And you are not wrong, either, in believing he does not care for you."

"Has he told you so?" asked Mdlle. de Bourbriac quickly.

"Your question is absurd. On what occasion could he have stated that he never noticed you and that you are perfectly indifferent to him? I am your sister, and, even had he divined that you had a fondness for him, he would not have chosen me as confidante of his sentiments regarding you. But I do not admit that, with his personal advantage and his rank, the Count of Trigavou could have kept his heart free up to his thirty-fifth year, abiding a place to plant it. I am certain he remains a bachelor only because he is enamoured. You are no girl, and I can speak freely."

"You mean he is in love with some one whom he will not marry——"

"Cannot marry?"

"She is a married woman, you mean?"

"Probably."

"Do you know who it is?" inquired Vivette, visibly blanching.

"Were I to answer yes, you would want me to name her, and I do not intend to do that. Women ought never to betray one another, and the count's secrets are no concern of mine. He has not entrusted this to me, but I am astonished you never guessed it, as you were at all the parties where he went last winter. Though you may be no observer, you have only to call to mind, or to inquire, easily to learn what you wish to know."

"I long to know nothing, and I am not going to trouble society," responded Mdlle. de Bourbriac, gloomily.

"What do you mean by that?"

"What I gave out already. I shall retire into Brittany and only attend to objects of charity."

"What about Olivier?"

"I cannot prevent him coming down to Trigavou to gather favourable testimony for Calorguen. But I do not consider myself engaged to him. The future is under the sole control of God. Olivier must wait."

Lady Houlbecq frowned with the thought—

"Vivette only half believes me when I assert Alain has another love. She does not despair of winning him to her, and who can deny she may succeed? He also is going down to Brittany to his farm, not far from the cottage where the old Calorguen woman is dying. I must put that dolt Olivier on his guard. Oh, if I could only speak and tell this lovesick girl, 'Alain is my darling, and I forbid you even thinking of him. If he dares marry you I'll kill him with my own hands!'"

The baroness was on the verge of uttering this audacious and perilous threat. Jealousy filled her heart, and she would have ruined all rather than let Alain be another's. She restrained herself, however, thinking there would be time to act at the extremity if the count paid his addresses to Vivette.

"And I am going to leave immediately," went on Mdlle. de Bourbriac.

"Nothing hinders you. You can put up at the castle, as it is yours," said Lady Houlbecq, not without a sting.

"No. Since I do not accept your husband's heritage, my first care on arriving will be to have the Dinan lawyer make out the deed of renunciation."

"Won't you reflect before you despoil yourself?"

"All my reflections are made. Until I buy a house I like, I shall live with Mother Calorguen."

"You are free to live where you please."

"I regret parting from you, but yesterday you made me comprehend how necessary it was. Besides, you are going to leave France for ever, you said."

"Oh, no; I have altered my mind."

"May I know why?" inquired Vivette after a pause.

Her eyes and Flavia's met, and the sisters exchanged a long look. The younger sought to read the elder's soul, while she forced herself to keep an impenetrable countenance, and replied rather dryly—

"I am not also free to do as I like?"

"Completely free. So you remain in town?"

"Not here, though. I have charged some one to find me rooms, but you are not obliged to stay till I find them.

Whether you give up your brother-in-law's succession or not, you can dispose of the money, his first testament."

"I know that. I shall be off to-morrow."

"Without seeing Olivier?"

"Without seeing anybody," rejoined Vivette, rising.

Lady Houlbecq did not try to detain her. She was wondering to herself, "Has she guessed I love Alain? Maybe. Well. What do I care as long as he is mine? She cannot steal him away, for I shall not let him go into Brittany."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE MAGNET CITY CONTINUES TO DRAW

AT the same time as Lady Houlbecq was cruelly torturing her sister, Olivier Derquy promenaded the Boulevard des Italiens on Dr. Avangour's arm, to kill the evening till he had to go and dine with the Count of Trigavou. Our good-hearted Olivier was delighted at having so well employed the previous day. He had found a friend believed dead ; he had made the proposal so well received by the Vivette whom he loved since boyhood ; all this was enough to render him happy and he was radiant with his joy, though dashed a little with regret at not having been received just now on calling at the house in Friedland Avenue.

The doctor, met at the corner of Helder Street, appeared much less gay, and yet Olivier had told him of meeting the count returned from Scotland, in Monceau Park. Without trying to hide his astonishment, Avangour heard the relation out with much attention, and only interrupted at times for supplementary explanations. He even shook his head in token of doubt, and he did not feel perfectly convinced that the hermit of Hunaudaie had wasted a whole month in the Highlands. This doubt was intensified when the lieutenant mentioned the man followed by the pair of them to the corner of Teheran Street and asserted that this was not the Breton farmer.

"I am certain I am not mistaken," cried he quickly. "I know Pillemer like his master, or even better, for I have seen more of him. The count has never called me in, probably because he is always hale, but his man has come over to my study at Dinan, not once, but a dozen times."

"Then how comes it this man did not recognise the count?" objected the naval officer.

"It is still more extraordinary that the count did not call to him."

"He did not see him."

"He must have had eyes; but you saw him, and you must have pointed him out."

"So I did. He repeated that his farmer was not in town and could not have come, and he pretends that you took some rural visitor for Pillemer."

"Ha! he knows I was with you when you met that man in the St. Honoré Faubourg?"

"There's no reason I should keep that back. I even told him that it was you who picked him out. Do you judge me wrong?"

"No, no, my dear sir. Stick to the proverb: 'Tell the truth and shame the unmentionable gentleman below.'"

"Still, doctor, I see you are not pleased."

"I fear that the lord of Trigavou will accuse me of meddling with what does not concern me."

"Should he say so, I will remind him that when you joined with me in dogging Pillemer, or whomsoever it was, we were ignorant that Pillemer's landlord was alive."

"Very true," murmured Avangour. "And, anyway, it is a matter of indifference to me whether my lord of Trigavou thinks ill or well of me."

"Not a friend of yours?"

"No. I have very seldom come in contact with him. I have met him two or three times at most, whilst he was on the farm in summer time."

"It strikes me he did not capture you then?"

"I do not like men who hide their lives."

"I was not aware he hid his."

"His life down among us was an owl's. Nobody ever saw him in the daytime, and it was presumed he roved at night."

"He has much changed. When I knew him, no man was better known."

"So he is still here in Paris. His love of solitude only rules him in Brittany. But he has the right to live in his own style. If I do not treat him with all the fairness, let alone kindness, he may merit, it is because I cannot help my grudge against his farmer, who is the accuser of that hapless gamekeeper. I do not say Calorguen is innocent or that Pillemer is bearing him false witness, but Pillemer is the reverse of sympathetic to me in the highest degree. He is still more shady than the master of Trigavou. All the country people hate him."

"And you cast upon the lord some of the overflow of antipathy inspired by the varlet? Well, I assure you that my dear Alain is no enemy of Calorguen's. During the long conversation of yesterday he never spoke one single word against the man. He even promised to question his tenant farmer and hold the whip over him to know if he did not lie in affirming that he had seen the keeper steal along the park wall at the hour of the crime."

"What! Is the count going down to the Hunaudaie before the trial?"

"I know nothing about it. But if he does it will be to try to be useful to Calorguen. Anyway, I am going down and should Alain do so, we will work together to demonstrate the poor fellow's innocence."

"Don't you fear you may damage his case in trying to strengthen it? Judges are distrustful, and they may want to know why you are so hot in defending the man accused, of General Houlbecq's murder."

"If such an impertinent question is put to me I should answer the whole bench that my cousin—my wife soon to be—firmly believes that Calorguen is not guilty. It is quite natural I should interest myself in him."

"Beyond doubt. But I advise you not to mention Mdlle. de Bourbriac, who will do wrong to meddle in the sad case."

"Still, she has decided to meddle actively with it, and I do not censure her. What has she to fear? I do not suppose anyone will suggest her complicity?"

"That would be shameful—aye, and absurd! It is none the less true that public opinion would be unfavourable to her. She would be blamed for interfering on behalf of the murderer of her brother-in-law."

"By Jove, doctor, perhaps you are right!" said Olivier, struck by Dr. Avangour's persistence in denoting an evident danger. "I know what the country is, and how gossips thrive. I shall try to calm my cousin and preach moderation to her."

He did not know that it was too late since, from the night before, Vivette had determined to push matters to the extreme. In talking with her he had understood that she thought of settling down at the castle, or near by, where he had promised to join her. But he was ignorant that, as the outcome of a stormy explanation with her sister, she had resolved to start the next day.

Dr. Avangour was felicitating him on the praiseworthy intention he announced when a gentleman came out of a cigar shop near the Opera Passage right upon them and exclaimed:

"Thunder! The doctor! Here's a slice of luck!"

"How are you, commander? I hardly expected to meet you in town."

"Well, I don't run up often," answered the gentleman glancing at Olivier askant as he was eyeing him.

"Allow me to introduce a fellow countryman and a brother seaman—Lieutenant Derquy."

"It seemed to me the gentleman was no stranger, and I hope he remembers me."

"Commander Jugon, if I am not mistaken," said Olivier.

"The man himself, youngster, the genuine old Jugon who commanded the good old frigate *Terpsichcore* before you left the naval school. Mightily flattered that you remember me, spite of damages through time and weather. My whiskers were pepper and salt before you sailed—now they are all snow, sir. Excuse me not making you out at the first squint, but bless you, you have decked your figure-head, let your beard grow, by jingo!"

"It's allowed us on the China station, commander."

"Ay, I know they sail with the old regulations slung overboard like the pirate's logbook when the cruiser bear down; still, under regulations, you do your duty, boy, and win the bit of red ribbon you wear at your button-hole. My compliments, lad! you cut in for it like a brick. Admiral Courbet logged you down several times. I believe you sailed on the *Bayard*."

"Yes, commander; I was wounded in the action of the 30th August and sent home on a year's leave. I got into Paris day before yesterday."

"Then I hope to have you down to Lanvollon. Fond of hunting?"

"I'm not afraid of it," replied Olivier modestly.

"That's enough. I can count you in this winter. Meanwhile, I hope we shall meet right often in the city. I have come up for a month's cruise after ten years' absence. So I am dropping in on all the novelties. Where do you think I was bound when I came athwart you? Why to the Grevin Museum. Come along with me!"

"Many thanks, commander, but I——"

"Bear me company to the port's mouth, anyhow. Our dear Avangour will not affront us by steering off so soon. I am fresh from the daisies and hedgeroses, and am full chock a-block with news to tell ye."

This sufficed to overcome Derquy and even to attract the doctor, who recollected clearly how the commander at the general's funeral, in the graveyard before a throng, had given his opinion on the causes of the murder and on some of the still inexplicable facts.

The two flanked the old sea-officer, and thus the trio continued to stroll in the direction of the Montmartre Boulevard.

# CHAPTER XXIV

## WHO SOUNDED THE LURE?

"My dear fellow," began Jugon, "I suppose I shall not have to tell you of my regretted neighbour's sad end. He was your relative——"

"By marriage. Lady Houlbecq is my cousin german."

"A charming lady, whom everybody pities. I would have gone to see her on my arrival only I feared being intrusive; but I am sorry for her misfortune and beg you to tell her so."

Derquy bowed. This hearty expression of sympathy pleased him. He did not believe that his future sister-in-law could be suspected, but, as a kinsman ought, he was glad to hear that the general's friends interested themselves in the widow. This language seemed also to please Dr. Avangour, more sceptical in these matters than Vivette's betrothed.

"No doubt you know," pursued the old seaman, "that they've arrested and locked up one of poor Houlbecq's keepers, an old soldier of the very squadron he commanded in the war of 1870."

"I know that and believe they're wrong."

"I coincide. But what you perhaps do not know is that Houlbecq was at my house at Lanvollon, when he suddenly shot off home to be killed so vilely in one of his own castle windows."

"I have been told so without knowing what possessed him to fly home."

"Just imagine that we were all toasting St. Hubert jollily, a dozen round the board and the general the merriest of the crew. After dinner, and before coffee came in, he went up into his room for a box of cigars for us, brought over in his dressing-case. We awaited him as the monks wait for the abbot—drinking lustily till he should come. But we never saw him more. Without informing me even of his departure he ordered the horse to be put to his dogcart, and was rattling away on the Trigavou road in a quarter of an hour. Mark that he had come over in an open vehicle, and that it was pouring with rain."

"What had happened?"

"That's what puzzles us, and what the investigating judge asked me when I was called before him. I had to reply that I did not know, for it was not till later the idea struck me that he must have found some writing in his room which started him post-haste to Trigavou. Who had brought him a letter? I hauled my servants over the coals. They said nobody to their knowledge had gone up to the second floor where I lodged the baron. Still I learnt that one outsider, suspicious to me, had come into the kitchen. He had often done that before. He don't live far from Lanvollon and knows my men, who let him in and gabble with him. I forbade them receiving him for the future, but the tar kettle had been upset."

"Of whom are you speaking?" inquired the doctor quickly.

"You know the rascal well; the farmer of the Hunaudaie named Pillemer."

"Pillemer!" repeated the navy officer. "Do you suspect him of writing to General Houlbecq?"

"Or at least of bringing a letter which induced the poor veteran to return abruptly to Trigavou," said Commander Jugon. "As for his writing, that's another matter, for firstly I doubt if he is any fist at writing. And then, if, as I believe the object of the letter was to decoy Houlbecq into a death-trap, Pillemer's part would be limited to a messenger's."

"From whom?"

"Now you have me with my line in a knot. I am knee-deep in suppositions, for nobody has come across the note the general probably lit his pipe with it. But I'll bet a ship to a shallop Pillemer is a bad lot. Do you know him?"

"I have heard nobody but him spoken of lately," replied Olivier, evasively. "But it will be easy for me to know him from the keel to the ball, for I am to dine with his landlord this afternoon."

"The Count of Trigavou? Has he turned up again?"

"Yes, indeed! I met him yesterday."

"I am not taken aback. Down our way they said he was dead. I never believed it. Trigavou is not a man to love going under hatches. Well, as you're going to meet him, put it to him straight: Why does his farmer hang round Lanvollon? And add that I have ordered him to be kicked out if ever he dares step inside my house."

"No doubt the count is ignorant of what Pillemer does. But I will pass the word, commander, though there's nothing agreeable in it. Are you on bad terms with the count?"

"On neither bad nor good. I never see him, my boy. He is a skulker who steers clear of the joskins. He don't care for sport, only for Parisian pastimes. Bah! a pretty Breton —nobody ever saw the like!"

"Still he does spend part of the year on native soil."

"Because he has not a penny to bless himself with. He only rusticates in order to save what he does no good with. I had no idea that you were so fond of him."

"We are not bosom friends, but I saw a good deal of him in former times, and I was delighted to find him again on my return from China. Besides, I have need of him just now, for Pillemer is the very man who accuses Calorguen the keeper, and Trigavou promised me to question his tenant to extract the truth."

"Hem! I am afraid that master and man are steward and purser—a pair o' rogues."

"You are severe, commander," observed Derquy, a little vexed to hear a man so spoken of whom he called friend. "Clearly you are prejudiced against your neighbour at the Hunaudaie."

"I own that, and I may be wrong. But ask the doctor what he thinks of the party."

"Useless," replied Derquy, smiling. "The Doctor has made himself plain on that point, not hiding that he does not dote on the master of Trigavou."

"I gave my reasons," added Avangour.

"Yes, much like the commander's. Gentlemen, I do not undertake to plead the cause of poor Alain, who, I vow, is better than his reputation. Besides, I hope you are not going to accuse him of mixing in with Pillemer's conspiracies."

"No," rejoined Jugon, plainly, "and the proof is that I asked you to carry my complaint about that knave to him."

"I shall not fail to do so."

The doctor said nothing, and, as silence gives consent, Derquy took it that he agreed with the naval veteran that the lord of Trigavou was not to be held responsible for his tenant's villainies.

"Let's speak no more of such people," resumed the old seaman, "they're not worth the trouble. Here we are at the entrance to the Grévin Museum."

"And here we take our leave of you," cried Jugon's two compatriots in chorus.

"No, no, I haven't towed you along to drop you at the haven mouth. I have you fast, and, by all that's blue, I shall hold on. You must come in with me. It will not take long to inspect the show, and I'll cast off my grapplings when we come forth. I have a dinner appointment with an old friend of the service at six in the Palais Royal."

Olivier consulted his watch, and saw that he had time enough for meeting the Count of Trigavou at his club. The commander's talk interested him, and he did not despair of obtaining further information. So he dragged Dr. Avangour along, who had some hints to pick up in the same quarter.

The commander was already at the ticket office, paying for the party.

Derquy was a little astonished at the curiosity of this navigator, who had traversed every sea and yet went out of his way to see a waxwork show. He exchanged a smile with the doctor, no less astonished than himself. But Pillemer danced before their eyes, and as they had nothing better to do they followed Jugon. They reckoned to get him to discourse on the enigmatical farmer of the Hunaudaie, but they reckoned without their host. Sixty-six years old was this man-o'-war captain, but having always lived in cabin or counting-house, he was not used up on Parisian exhibitions, and his admiration was easily affected.

Scarcely had he entered the first room than he cried out with surprise at the groups of theatrical and literary celebrities unknown to him, and almost as much to the country Galen. Hence Lieutenant Derquy had to name them.

Though coming from China last, he had often stayed in the capital, and was sufficiently well informed to play the cicerone, though against his taste, for his thoughts were elsewhere. The delighted son of Neptune made laughable comments on the figures, and finally fell into ecstasy over that of a celebrated actress whose eccentricities, pictured in the papers received at Lanvollon, had often entertained him. In his enthusiasm he declared that she was almost as handsome as Lady Houlbecq, whom she did not resemble in the slightest feature. Dr. Avangour tried to seize this opening to bring the conversation back to the incidents preceding the general's death, but failed. The old sea-dog did not listen, and would not omit a single character.

When the hall had been visited in every turn and corner, the two friends thought the long-drawn agony was over, but, lo! the remorseless drag exclaimed:

"Now we have still the Chamber of Horrors to see, modelled after that in Tussaud's Waxworks at London."

"What is that?" demanded the doctor.

"Don't you know? The cavern where they picture all the celebrated crimes—the most curious of the collection. Come along, my lads!"

He pushed them, remonstrating, towards the staircase which leads down into the basement, tricked out to impress the lovers of tragic spectacle. Only twilight was let in, and that gave the models a more life-like effect. At this period was shown the fishing up of a murdered man from the river and the Czar, Alexander II., on the state deathbed--something for all tastes.

"These city chaps make money out of everything," said the commander, leading the march. "Some of these days they'll do the crime of Trigavou Castle."

"If ever they dared," began Derquy, angrily.

"You would beat in the dolls' heads with your cane! And quite right you'd be, my lad. But, bless you, it'll never come to that. Anyway, first the trial must be over and Caorguen condemned, to say nothing to Lady Houlbecq's right to oppose their putting her on the stage. She was by when her husband was shot down. But there'll be no need for her to interfere to prevent an exhibition which the police would certainly not allow. What I said just now was only in joke—an idea that went through my head as we came down into the cellar, so nicely set out to frighten youkers. Now, let's inspect these sanguinary villains."

Derquy and Avangour had no desire, but they were too far advanced to withdraw. Putting the best face on, they followed the untiring commander as he examined a series of compartments where were represented in life-size the degrees of crime ; the murder, the arrest, the preparation of the condemned men for the march to death—all were represented, as was also the guillotine, which was visible in a well-painted background.

M. Jugon could dwell on the scenes, as there was no crowd this day. Before the last tableau, that of the scaffold, only one man was stationed, leaning on the railing, completely absorbed in the interesting sight before his nose. His back was to them, and he did not budge if even he heard them walking up.

"Is that the guillotine?" exclaimed the ancient mariner. "I had altogether another idea of it. It looks for all the world like the side view of a sewing-machine painted red!"

At this singular comparison, not without some foundation the spectator lifted his head and showed his countenance to the speaker, who, to the great stupefaction of his companions, sprang at him, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him, under a gas jet at the entrance of the Chamber of Horrors.

"What are you doing here, eh?" he cried, shaking him roughly.

The answer to this and other more sinister mysteries will be found revealed in the second part.

# THE CONDEMNED DOOR.

## VOLUME TWO.

## CHAPTER XXV

### AN AWKWARD ENCOUNTER

On seeing the stranger's face, both the doctor and the lieutenant knew it. He recognised them too, for he turned pale.

"What am I doing here? Looking about me," he stammered.

"Looking upon the machine by which your head will be cut off, rascal! At last I have got you! I've been looking out for you long enough."

"Am I not easy enough to find? I don't live a great stretch from you."

"I never want to go inside your caboose of the Hunaudaie, and you have the sense not to steal up to Lanvollon since my men have the word to sling you out of the door. But as I have my grapnel on you, you'll account to me now."

"Account to you! Why to you? You're not my master."

"Lucky for you I am not! And what pranks you play on your master don't fret me. But I mean to know what you were doing in my house St. Hubert's Night."

"Me? Nothing! You know I am friendly with all the folk at Lanvollon. Well, I was alone on the farm that day, for master had gone away the evening before, so I came over for good company—to eat a cake and swallow some cider—and I took myself back home."

"At what time?"

"As nine were a-striking. I left your place at a quarter to eight, and I did not go to sleep on the road."

"Good, so far. When you were at my place you kept to the kitchen?"

"I am certain sure I did. Ask any of your folks."

"They saw you go out, but did not notice when you came in."

"And what for should I steal in underhanded-like? Do you think I would act the thief?"

"I believe you are Jack of many a queer trade."

"Me? How can you say so? Me, that's been over thirty year in the service of the old masters of Trigavou; me, that were borned on the land the count that's dead—long rest him!—sold—more's the hardship!—to Baron de Houlbecq! Go to, your honour! Ask a bit about me, that's well known up hill and down vale, aye, and along the ridge too."

"Very fine! but I am not a police magistrate and do not want to know such things. What I do say is that on St. Hubert's Night you did not come into Lanvollon House purely to refresh yourself. You sneaked in with a letter for General Houlbecq."

"Lord love us! Me, that never knowed he was in the house at all!"

"At least you do know he was killed next day?"

"In course I does. Aye, and I know by who—in token of which I named the villain and he's locked up."

"Calorguen—a better man than you."

"Anyhow, I see him a-prowling along o' the park wall five minutes arter the gun went off. It were the honest truth I up and told the judge."

This dialogue might have run on long in this strain without coming to an end, the one asserting, the other denying, for the commander had no proofs. Meanwhile Derquy scrutinized the man he had "shadowed" the previous evening and pronounced his face that of a rascal. He was astonished that the Count of Trigavou gave his confidence to him, but he forbore intervening in a discussion upon facts not known to him. The better-informed doctor saw that Jugon was on the wrong track and stepped in to turn the interrogatory.

"Look ye, Pillemer," said he, with a coaxing air, "I do not accuse you of anything, but I can ask you what is your business in Paris? Is your farm left to look after itself alone?"

"Asking your pardon and, eke, your excuses, good Dr. Avangour, I have left my ploughman, Jacquot, and Nanon, the dairy wench. As for the why and wherefore of your honour's seeing me in the big city, I don't mind telling ye, provided you promise not to let it go no further, because, look'ee, it's all a bit o' downright foolishness on my part. Yes, I were a fool not to stick to the Hunaudaie. But who can help some o' these here things? Why, any day these twenty year I've been itching to go see Paris. I am e'ena'most the only man round the village that's never seen 'un, and the lads chaff and jeer me awful. Whereupon I screwed up my mind that I'd see un', but I would no' let anybody know I was doing it. I told Jacquot I must 'tend to the fairs in the Mayenne District, and it 'ud keep me away nigh a week. Thereon, off I starts with what clothes I had to my back, crossed the Rance at Port St. Jean, walked to Dol, where I got me a third-class return ticket, and here I be at your honour's service."

"Come up simply for a stare about?" said the commander. "Do you think I shall swallow that?"

"It's pure truth, anyhow, sir. This here trip be going to cost me, at the least reckoning, all of fifty crowns, but it'll satisfy my longing. I am able to afford it, too; that's the best consolation. But what a monstracious town this Paris be! I haven't any legs to go up and down the no end of streets, saying nothing of them making you pay stiff for every mortal thing. They plundered me of twenty pence to let me in here, and I could 'a' seen the same waxen dollies at Dinan Fair for a penny."

"What hardihood you have to say you came away without changing your dress. Rubbish! As long as I've known you, I never saw you rigged out in such toggery."

"Don't be hard on me! It's rough enough to be forced, to flower out like a Parisian. When I stepped out of the railway station in my drugget waistcoat and my broad brim, blessed if the little boys did not 'guy' me like a beast in a show. So I was druv to hire this here outfit of a second-hand dealer, who 'grees to take 'em back and hand me my own, d'ye see?"

Dr. Avangour had let Pillemer ramble without check. He hoped he would mire himself, and deemed this the nick in which to thrust the only question interesting him,to wit, the relations of this disguised clown with Trigavou's lord.

"Where are you stopping?" he abruptly demanded.

"In any inn that comes handy," replied the farmer, without being disconcerted; "it depends on what part I am in at the time. For instance, last night as is, being out to see the city slaughtering-houses at the Villette—a whacking big little town—why, I had a bed there."

"Seen your master yet?"

"The count? Oh, there's no fear of my going near him, even if he were in Paris, seeing as how I left the farm without his leave and license. Lor'! what a trouncing he'd give me! By the same token, if any o' ye gentlemen meet him, let me beseech ye not to tell him I frisked over the hedges."

"If he is not in Paris, where would he be?"

"Would I did know!" sighed Pillemer. He left us the eve of St. Hubert's—which it is the Day of the Dead—mighty unlucky that same! and never a word ha' I heerd o' him sin'."

"How singular," remarked Derquy, "that you should have been driving through Morceau Park yesterday——"

"True enow that I were in a hackney coach," mumbled Pillemer. "Very expensive that—but I never did that before. So your honour saw me?"

"Yes, and the Count of Trigavou might have seen you, for he was there beside me."

"Is that so? Real true? Well, I am glad to hear it!

Here's five good weeks without news of him, enough to make me think somewhiles that he were dead."

"That's what you have been saying down our way," grumbled Jugon.

"If I said it, it's 'cause I believe it, sir. But I am of good cheer now this gentleman has seed him. Did he see me, sir?"

This question to Derquy was answered negatively.

"But I told him you had gone by."

"Wait a bit," cried Pillemer, "I can place it all now. It was you who eyed me so hard when I stopped at a street corner on the great street."

"M. Derquy is a cousin of Lady Houlbecq," observed the doctor.

"Goodness gracious! And I took him for a police spy."

"What do you dare say?" cried the commander.

"Allow me! Put yourself in my place. Down our way they say Paris is full of secret policemen. I see a strange gentleman hovering round me. Very well; then I got scared and jumped into a hackney-coach."

"You would not fear the police if your conscience was clear."

"It is as clear as a whistle, commander. But I have had no regular lodging since I came to Paris, and I feared that was wrote on my face, so I cut away in the carriage and never got out till I reached the Villette shambles."

"Never thought you so timid."

"The sum tottle is that my lord has larnt I am in town. I shall have to go show myself now! He would never look over my keeping away."

"You will not find him at home at present. But I know where he is, and will show you," said Derquy.

"I can't wish anything more, my kind gentlemen, though I expect to catch it hot; but you'll put in a good word for me, eh, sir?"

Pillemer seemed quite eager now to be brought before the Count of Trigavou. He looked at the stairs uneasily, as if he feared the coming of somebody who would delay him.

The doctor took Derquy on one side and said :

"The idea of bringing this man and Lord Trigavou into contact is capital—on condition you are by—the only means of making sure neither are lying in asserting that they have not met in Paris."

"What, do you suspect Alain of playing a part ?" queried the lieutenant.

Avangour had no time to reply, for Pillemer struck in :

"If it drags your honour out o' your road to see me to master, just tell me where he is so I can find him by myself."

"At his club. But you would not be allowed in, whilst he expected me. I will have him called down. Come on."

"I will go along," said the commander, "as I have a few words for the count. Where's this club of his ?"

"Corner of Opera Place."

"Very good. I can get to the Palais Royal from there."

Pillemer listened silently, in the way rustics have. He lost not a word and doubtless profited by them. Still his eyes were on the stairs, evidently anxious to be off.

"I shall go out with you," said the medical gentleman in Olivier's ear, "but you can drop me on the road ; I don't care to meet the count."

He led the way up the winding staircase, Pillemer next and the two naval gentlemen following close, both perplexed, athough far from incriminating Alain of Trigavou as responsible for his tenant's words and deeds. They rapidly traversed the floor above and reached the Montmartre Boulevard together.

Only a few paces from the museum entrance, before the Jouffroy Passage, whom should they behold but the lord of Trigavou coming towards them with long strides, like one belated for an appointment. The doctor and the young marine officer glanced meaningly at one another, struck with the very same thought that the master had come to meet the man.

Pillemer, really excited, had already doffed his hat.

Blinded for a moment by a group of promenaders, Trigavou came unexpectedly upon the four Bretons and started back in amaze to see his tenant at the Hunaudaie guarded by the three. But he recovered very quickly and saluted them collectively with a "Howdy'e do, gentlemen? Happy to meet you." Then buttonholing Pillemer by his hired coat he rated him roughly, spite of his pitiful air.

"Is this how you keep my property, you delinquent scamp?" shaking him too. "Who allowed you to come up to town? My friend here told me yesterday that he saw you in a carriage in Monceau Park, and I could not believe it. Now I must trust my eyes. It appears that you indulge in wild outings when I am away. I have likewise heard that you have been telling the folks that I was dead. But I am alive—very much alive—to your bad behaviour, and you shall pay for it dearly. You can hie home to the Hunaudaie, but only to pack up your things. You are no more my tenant. I send you away."

Pillemer whined out what he had been telling of his adventures. He melted in tearful excuses, swore he was ready to go back and never leave the farm any more without the authorisation of his lord and master. The observant doctor thought his emotion was not sincere, and that Trigavou's ire had not frightened him greatly. On the contrary, Derquy took the affair as serious, whilst Jugon thought it a happy moment to pile the burning coals upon poor Pillemer.

"My lord," said he, "I have not the honour to be among your lordship's friends, but we have long been acquaintances, and I can answer for it that everybody will approve of your packing off this knave who gets you an ill name. This is the cause of the general getting killed."

"How so, sir?" inquired Trigavou, coldly.

"He slipped into my house at Lanvollon on St. Hubert's Night with a note, I believe, that enticed Baron Houlbecq into hurried departure."

"Did you do this?" challenged the count of his tenant looking him in the white of the eyes, as the saying goes.

His tone was such that Dr. Avangour did not suspect the count of feigning anger now. He had turned pale, frowned, and seemed endeavouring to read Pillemer's inner self, whils the latter showed indubitable embarrassment.

"Clearly," mused the doctor, "the count did not send his man to Lanvollon, but nothing will make me think he did not know his man was in town. I would not be much surprised to hear he made appointments with him in Monceau Park and the Grévin Museum. There's a secret tie between this pair."

Pillemer denied this with much more energy than when he was excusing his excursion, Commander Jugon's accusation troubling him greater than all the count's threats and reproaches.

"My lord," resumed the commander, "I do not care to meddle with what does not concern me, and I have heard your farmer's explanation. You are warned about him, and you will kindly let me take leave of these gentlemen."

Without awaiting a reply Commander Jugon shook hands with his companions, gave the nobleman a curt nod, and stalked off southwardly.

This colloquy had taken place in the street, a most frequented spot, where they had been much jostled. Dr. Avangour had no wish to continue it. He excused himself to Derquy, who did not detain him, saluted the Count of Trigavou, and made off, leaving the two with Pillemer.

"To-morrow morning, at my rooms, Miromesnil Street," said his master, "I shall expect you to hand in your accounts. Try to behave yourself properly till then. Now be off. I have had enough of your company."

Pillemer did not ask a repetition of the order. He whirled round and glided into the Jouffroy passage, where the crowd hid him. Trigavou took Olivier's arm, and, drawing him towards the Opera Square, said:

"Your friends seem rather set against me, but I fret very little about their opinion. Enough that we should move in concord. I am starting at once on the work in the aid of poor Calorguen, who seems to be more than ever innocent ince I have to believe my farmer a rogue. His trip to Paris looks bad, sir, and his sneaking into Lanvollon House, on St. Hubert's Night, still blacker. I will have it out with him in the morning If he is playing any trick, I shall not spare him, I assure you ; and if he bears false witness against the keeper, I will force him to retract it before the very magistrate who received his deposition. But I have a piece of news for you. I have been officially notified that my turn has come for jury-call at the next assizes of the North Coast Department. If I am put in the box to try Calorguen, I need not tell you, my dear Olivier, that he will have a hearty defender in me."

"My cousin will be very grateful," returned Derquy, trying to smooth his wits, no little agitated by the incident in the Grévin Museum and the commander's remarks.

"Now, take my word for it," pursued Trigavou, "we'll cut all these stories, to dine free from care at my club. I'll carry you straight to it and you'll meet there some capital fellows whom you used to know and who will hurrah to see you! Tell them how you thrashed the long tails in the East, and, after the dinner, if you like, we'll do the plays. In any case, we'll have a pleasant evening together, and—devil take serious affairs!"

# CHAPTER XXVI

## SEEKING THE MAN OF MYSTERY

Vivette de Bourbriac never broke her word and never went back on a determination. Two days after the decisive interview in which her sister had shown herself under a fresh aspect, Vivette was in the afternoon train for Brittany. She was off without seeing Lieutenant Derquy, as she had stated, and without even a farewell to her sister. She went alone, without the maid, who would have hampered her, rather than helped her, on this hazardous expedition. She took little baggage or money, although she might have carried considerable of the latter, as the general's banker, under the terms of the first will, held a hundred and fifty thousand francs at her call.

English and American ladies often travel thus and no one gainsays it; but in France single ladies are held in the leash, and Vivette risked her reputation in this adventure, though at an age when a woman ought to enjoy the right to do as she pleases.

But since her final interview with her sister, Vivette had settled to live absolutely independent even if this freedom prevented her marriage subsequently—a matter not on her mind at present.

Wounded by Lady Houlbecq's perfidious shafts, she left Paris to terminate an irksome position and to occupy herself with Calorguen's deliverance. Though she had told her sister the contrary, she deemed herself bound to Derquy, and hoped to love him yet as she imagined a husband should be loved, but she first wished to obtain calmness for her perturbed heart. She did not, therefore, wish her cousin to join her too soon.

Count Trigavou she tried to forget. She had not divined he was her sister's paramour, but she did not doubt he had a conquest in Parisian society, and believed he would not cross her path down in Brittany.

Vivette had only written to the gamekeeper's mother about her journey, and instead of going through Dinan, where many knew her, she went to St. Malo, and thence to Trigavou by the Dinard boat and a hired vehicle. She avoided the castle, where many reasons prevented her staying, and alighted at the gamekeeper's, where her room was ready—Pierre's room, the only one empty. In a couple of days her talent for household arrangements made it almost comfortable. A woman came in to do the work, and she took her meals beside the paralytic's bedside on the ground floor. She could never induce little Yvon to sit opposite her. He preferred to huddle himself upon his stool in the great fireplace, and at first the guest had much difficulty in drawing a few words from him. Then he became more sociable, and she did not despair of sounding him after a while to good purpose.

Otherwise, in her week of cottage life she had not lost her time. All the village feasted her, and not one of the honest toilers believed that Calorguen had slain his master, while several did not scruple to call Pillemer a false witness.

Up at the castle, old Broladre, the gardener left in charge by Lady Houlbecq, vowed that the gamekeeper was a victim of some conspiracy, that the truth must come some day, and that there were not twelve honest men for a jury in all the country who would bring Pierre in guilty.

These unanimous protests consoled the young lady, but did not set her at ease so long as nobody pointed out the true culprit, and the prisoner could not be liberated merely by cursing the public prosecutor, the judges, and Grisaille, the terrible gendarme officer.

Vivette heard that Dr. Avangour had returned to Dinan, and wondered no little that he did not come over to his patient. She wanted to ask him if Calorguen was still in solitary confinement, as she dared not write to him. So far, she had not furthered the prisoner's cause, and resting thus would not serve him.

Vivette had received no news from her sister, though this silence did not astonish her after the scene which enforced her departure. It was less comprehensible that Derquy did not write. He could not be ignorant she had abruptly left their town-house, and Lady Houlbecq must have informed him whither she had gone. He ought to guess, since she had confided her project to him of attempting Calorguen's freedom. Did he abstain out of delicacy from engaging in correspondence, or did he intend flying thither without herald to prevent her asking him not to come? Whatever the reason, Mdlle. de Bourbriac did not regret his absence; he would have fettered her.

She had gathered much intelligence, but nothing very new. The hour came for her personal labour, recommencing the magisterial inquiry of six weeks before. She knew the facts; she could not explain the causes. She had seen her brother-in-law stretched on the red stained carpet and she had flown to her swooned sister's assistance. The links were not clearly seen which chained the scenes of the dismal tragedy together.

Hours before the deed, and after it again, Flavia had spoken enough to put her on the trail. A man had entered the castle in the night, and Lady Houlbecq had helped him to concealment.

Was this man the murderer?

How had he escaped thence, and what had become of him?

She could not ask this of others lest she gravely entangled her sister, whom nobody blamed, not knowing her actions that night. Forced to rely on herself in her task to clear away all obscurities, she contemplated visiting the scene of the crime.

The gunshot had come out of the grounds, and the man

Lady Houlbecq harboured could only have hidden himself in the great tower. Vivette would take the grounds first.

Up to now she had only left the keeper's cottage to go to church and the burial-ground, where the general's body still awaited the widow's order for removal to the family vault. The villagers and Broladre had met Mdlle. de Bourbriac; some had called, but she had a repugnance to approach the castle.

The weather was vile and the roads in a very bad state.

Vivette awaited the first fine day—the seventh one. The pallid sun rose in a cloudless sky when the young lady, always up with the peep of day, profited thereby for her exploration.

She was not willing to go alone. Not that she required a guide on familiar grounds, but since the event she was less courageous, and prudently chose an escort for fear of some awkward encounter.

Yvon was at hand, and he loved her now heartily, so that he was overjoyed to follow her. Besides, she thought that he could point out precisely the spot where Calorguen put his gun aside till he returned for it. The two walked through the woods together. Yvon was little prone to chatter, but the young lady did not fail to question him on the way.

"You were at home when Pierre got back on the evening of the day Baron Houlbecq was killed?" she began.

"No, lady," replied the lad. "I got in half an hour after. Mother Calorguen had sent me to gather chestnuts on the Plumoden road."

"Then you were not able to tell the judge that Pierre did not look like a man who had done a wicked act?"

"Is the judge that gentleman clad all in black, who came over from Dinan when Pierre was put in prison?"

"Yes. He must have questioned you."

"No, lady. He did put a heap of queer talk on Mother Calorguen; but he never asked me nothing. And a good thing too—he'd a' gotten nought out o' me."

"How's that?"

"Because I've nought to tell 'un," answered the urchin after some hesitation. "Besides," he added, "Pierre bid me not to gabble. No need; I am used to holding my tongue."

Much surprised, Vivette looked fixedly at the speaker and proceeded:

"So Pierre is keeping something back?"

"Oh no, lady, Pierre never done no wrong. He told me that a matter o' three days afore the gendarmes took him."

"Good! But what did the order apply to? Did he trust you with some secret?"

"I'm sure he didn't. Only he don't like waggle-tongues, and if he likes me it's 'cause he sees I'm not that kind."

"But you will have to speak out if you are called to testify at the Assize Court."

"At St. Brieuc? Oh, will I? Hows'ever, if I'm fetched I'll go. And glad to go, too, for I shall see Pierre again; but I shan't say nothing, 'cause I know nothing—there!"

"You know at any rate that Pierre is an honest man."

"That I do, and I'll tell 'em that without any asking. And I'll also tell 'em that Corporal Grisaille owes him one—'cause Grisaille, when he came back from the wars, hoped General Houlbecq would take him for head gamekeeper. He would sooner ha' loafed about the castle than served in the gendarmerie; but, love you, our Pierre got the place, and so Grisaille nursed a spite agin him—see?"

"That is as well to know. Has Pierre any other enemies about here?"

"Dear, yes, the folks at the Hunaudaie."

"The farmer?"

"Aye, and the master a-'top o' that."

"What! the Lord of Trigavou?"

"Pierre don't like him. I have never seed the count myself, but I know Pillemer, and I'll take my Bible oath that Pillemer is a bad lot."

"And he has a grudge against Calorguen?"

"I should think he had, because, once on a time—ever so long ago—Pierre showed him up to General Houlbecq for having cut timber on Trigavou land when it had passed from the old count."

"The judges must hear this."

"I'll up and tell 'em myself, lady."

The dialogue dropped.

Vivette was reflecting on it, and concluded that Calorguen was unjustly accused by neighbours who considered themselves injured by him. But she could not admit that the master of Trigavou was in their number. A nobleman would not debase himself to a condition of shame against a poor keeper whom he probably hardly knew by sight. She promised herself to follow up the clue afforded by little Yvon.

# CHAPTER XXVII

## LITTLE YVON'S VOW OF SECRECY

In the interim, Vivette wished to see the place where Pierre was accused of lying in wait before he shot the baron. Dame Calorguen had not heard the interrogation of her son prior to his arrest, but Justice Miniac had come over to see her, and had told her what went on in the orchard between him and the keeper, in presence of Dr. Avangour and the gendarme. This repeated to Mdlle. de Bourbriac had fully informed her.

In ten minutes' walk they arrived at a by-road, well kept and bordered by the woods and the garden wall on one side and the other.

"Here it is, lady," said Yvon.

The two stopped beneath a colossal oak planted on the crest of a bank overrun with briars and high ferns. Here they overlooked the road macadamised with the blue granite peculiar to Brittany. On the other side the dilapidated wall built by the former Lord of Trigavou and never repaired by the new purchaser. It had recently crumbled down for a length of three or four yards, just in front of the tree against which Vivette stood. She had often noticed this gap and urged her brother-in-law to have it seen to. Hence to the garden gate was three hundred feet, roundly, and a fair pedestrian could get there and back in less than five minutes.

The young lady tried instantly to recall Mother Calorguen's story rehearsing the gendarme's imputations and her son's justification.

"So," said she, after her silence, "if Pierre's accusers are to be believed, he left this place to glide into the grounds through the gate when he might have climbed in by this breach, none too high. Under those bushes he hid the gun and drew it forth to shoot the general. Why did he take so much trouble He admits he laid the gun down in order to measure the gap, but denies he used the gun, though one barrel was found discharged. It is puzzling, if Calorguen does not lie. Yet, if guilty, he would have loaded up again or cleaned the gun on getting home. Who will ever know what really happened?"

"Why, I know, lady," broke in Yvon, lowering his voice as if he feared being overheard.

"You know, and never told me!"

"Never you, nor nobody, not even Mother Calorguen. And I shan't tell you, unless you promise not to tell it again."

"And why should I not repeat it, if your story may help to prove Calorguen's innocence?"

"'Cause this be not the time for it. Later on all's well, but if I speak too soon I shall hurt him instead of doing him good."

"I engage to keep to myself what you shall tell me."

"Then, lady, I can tell you what I saw. Two days after St. Hubert's, returning from gathering chestnuts in Plumodan Wood, I saw from a way off, as I was on this here road, a man coming out of the garden gates and a-hiding something under his smock frock. Stooping down, he stole along the wood the same way I was coming. Before he came up to that hole in the wall, he leaped on the bank and ferreted about in the brush. Not for long, for he clambered down lively on the road and walked away smartly. He had not seen me, though he passed me close, but I had cowered down in the hedge. Dusk was on, but it was clear enough to make out any one. I tried to see who he was, and I did see his face all plainly, but I don't know his name."

"Well, well?" cried Vivette, not understanding.

"Well, on he went, whilst I cut through the wood to get to the village to buy Mother Calorguen some bread. Pierre was at the house before me. We never spoke a word. I never heard the gun to go off, because it blew hard and from me. Pierre never heard none neither; more's the pity, for he would have run to the spot and most like ha' collared the wretch, and if he'd missed him, at all events he would not be blamed for it, for he would have run and roused the castle."

"The wretch! Think you the man in the smock——"

"He killed the general, and I reckon this is how he done it. He was hiding in the wood when Pierre laid his gun on the bank. He saw Pierre pull out his foot-rule and pass to the other side of the hole, where he stayed awhile a-measuring. The wretch pounced on the gun and ran to the gates—not fastened, mind you. He slipped into the grounds, shot the general up at the window, and scuttled back at the run to put the gun in its place. Nobody but me saw him, and I never imagined what he had done any more nor Pierre. Pierre took his gun and went home quietly. We only heard of the master's death two days after."

"But did you not say what you saw then?"

"No, lady. I heard no gun go off, and could not make out the game the man in the smock was up to. I did not know why he rummaged in the undergrowth, only thinking he was hunting som'at under the thorn. Afterwards, when they took Pierre, it come into my head. And Pierre does not know the nasty trick that lad served him by using of his own gun."

"You believe he made use of it, but you are not sure," murmured the lady, shaking her head. "Were you to tell this to the judges, they would believe you fancied it or invented it."

"And put me in the 'sylum, for everybody at Trigavou knows I am no conjuror. That is why I am not going to breathe a word on it to any but you. It's the solemn truth, though"

"But how about the farmer—this Pillemer, who asserts having seen Pierre do all that you say the stranger in the smock frock did?"

"Pillemer tells a lie! Such a whacker! Pillemer was nowhere round—unless he were up a tree, which it is like enow—but he'll be a liar all the same, for he could not have mistook our Pierre for the wicked wretch that passed me so close."

"Pillemer must have been there. If not, he could not have divined what happened under your eyes."

"Then he was up that tree yonder."

"But if he himself fired the shot?"

"Oh, that won't do, lady, though he's the man to 'a' done it. I know his face very well, and the man in the smock had no look at all of his."

Mdlle. de Bourbriac sought to sift the truth from the contradictory facts marking this somewhat incoherent recital, but she could not succeed.

Who was this mysterious marksman, the arch-villain knowing how to perpetrate his crime so that an innocent man would be accused? What motive had he to hate the general? And if events really transpired as Yvon declared, how could this desperado have foreseen that Baron Houlbecq would appear at a window on a cold winter's day at the very moment when he crept into the castle grounds?

The deeper she reflected, the more persuaded was she that this child had less common sense than imagination. Certainly more intelligent than she thought; that intelligence was not regulated by reason. She remembered that school had been no use to him, and that he believed all the country superstitions about fays, elves, and the like. Mother Calorguen often scolded him for stopping out of nights mooning and star-gazing. She concluded it was wrong to attach too much weight to the strange narration.

"Will you say all this to the court that will try Pierre?" she asked.

"Faith, I will," answered the lad stoutly, "if I can only catch that man in the smock by then."

"Are you looking for him?"

"I just is. Mother Calorguen thinks I go out to tend Pierre's vermin traps, but I never go nigh 'em. I prowl about everywhere, on the roadside and in the woods, hoping for to meet the man that killed our master. No luck up to now, and I'm near to b'lieving he don't belong to our parts."

"If he never is seen will you remain dumb?"

"If I speak they'll make me out a liar, and I said so afore, didn't I, that it 'ud do Pierre more harm than good."

"But suppose I speak?"

"Why, lady, you promised never to let it out."

"But how if Pierre orders you?"

"He'll first have to know what I knows, and they won't 'low me into his jail, d'ye see."

"Others may get the permission."

"You, lady?"

"Or somebody friendly to him and me."

She thought of Derquy for this mission, if he kept his word to come down into Brittany.

"Then," pursued Yvon, "you must make up some token with Pierre which he can show me when he wants me to speak. I only believe what I see."

"You distrust me, eh?"

"No, lady; but I vowed to Pierre to be dumb as a stone."

"What made you swear that? You just told me you never spoke to him of the man in the smock. Did he charge you with some secret?"

The urchin hung his head mutely. This significant evidence gave Vivette much to ponder upon. Of what secret could the little peasant be the custodian? She felt that further questioning would be fruitless, and, irritated by obtaining nothing clear, she was going to send him away, when he said, timidly:

"I beg you, lady, not to worry me no more; but try to squeeze me into the court-room on the trial day, where Pierre can see me. Do that much and there's no need for us to speak.

Pierre will understand me, and I'll understand him too, with ne'er a word."

At last it was plain that there was a secret between Calorguen and little Yvon, which the latter would faithfully guard until released of an oath by the man. Mdlle. de Bourbriac gave up any idea of pressing the boy, stubborn as a genuine Breton.

"I will do what I can," she said, curtly. "Now leave me to go on to the castle. You are in my way. Tell Mother Calorguen I shall be home in a hour."

Yvon made no sound, but turned back on the road they had used and vanished in the woods.

# CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE SECOND ON THE QUEST

AFTER watching the lad an instant, Vivette stepped down on the road, but, instead of proceeding to the castle gates, she slowly strolled towards the end of the grounds to make the circuit. She was in no hurry to see the gardener, who would scarcely have any news, and it required time for her ideas to settle after such a stirring-up as this unexpected story gave them.

Less than ever she doubted Calorguen's innocence, but she did not yet hope to make the jury share her belief. She wondered who this stranger could be, signalized by Yvon, and, moreover, whether sister Flavia might not have played some part in the drama rounded off by General Houlbecq's death. She did not yet dream that Flavia could have connived at the abominable deed—nay, would have spurned such an idea in loathing. But she was obliged to own to herself that she was not succeeding in finding her brother-in-law's slayer, and regretted her cousin was not at hand as a precious auxiliary.

Why was he loitering in Paris? Had his fiery zeal grown cold? Had Lady Houlbecq stayed his coming down to Trigavou, and even his writing, by declaring that his betrothed had gone away without a word on her destination?

Vivette concluded that the best means of learning how matters stood was to pocket her pride, and write first to Olivier to ask him plainly to come to her help.

Absorbed in thought she had walked far without remarking it, even to the corner of the wall around the enclosed grounds.

She turned it and continued to skirt the stones, approaching a summer-house jutting out, so neglected as to threaten to tumble down. It was now a kind of lumber-room or dust-hole ; its two wooden-shuttered windows were one on each side, and the country front had a rotten door which some boy in passing had partly smashed in with a brickbat.

Mdlle. de Bourbriac knew it well, and the question arose if the assassin might not have used it for his entrance and flight. This supposition clashed with Yvon's extraordinary tale, but the lady only partially credited that, and she wished to see the state of this outlet which the police did not seem to have examined. She turned its corner without foreseeing the shock awaiting her beyond.

A man was up in the doorway trying the solidity of the planks with both hands. His back was almost fully towards her, but by his garb she knew he was no peasant. It was composed of a fur-trimmed topcoat, a tasteful hunting-cap, and fashionably-made gaiters. Though his efforts seemed intended to break in the summer-house door, a gentleman so attired could not be taken for a burglar. Vivette, stupor-stricken, was going to turn back to avoid him, when, raising his head, she recognised by the profile the Count of Trigavou.

For very little more she would have fled, but that were ridiculous. He gave her no time to turn away, though, for he had recognised her and was already bowing with the readiness of a society man never at a loss.

"I am afraid I frighten you," he said, smiling.

"Small wonder! You little expected to find me here. Pray forgive my causing you some emotion—it would be the first time."

This hidden allusion to the winter's flirtation put Mdlle. de Bourbriac on her guard. She took care not to notice it and found enough coolness to reply :

"I was not aware you were down here, sir, and that explains my surprise at seeing you."

"Just so," said the count. "To put an end to it, let me tell how I came to be in Brittany again—unless you guess it

I left my dwelling at the Hunaudaie a couple of days before the sad event which plunged you all in mourning, and the news of which reached me in Scotland. Returned to town last week, I presented myself at Houlbecq House, but was not received. By the visit of a friend of mine, however, Olivier Derquy, your cousin, I learnt all the details of the tragic story. He told me that a gamekeeper had been arrested, whom I hold to be a downright honest fellow and in whom you interest yourself. I thought I might be useful to him by collecting testimony to his good character, and here I am hard at it since this morning. You have caught me in the act of verifying whether or not the villain could have entered the grounds by this door, and I am inclined to believe it."

"Excuse me, my lord, but you uttered Lieutenant Derquy's name. May I inquire if he is still in Paris?"

"Still there, but he is also coming here on the same errand as my own. We should have started together had he been fit for travel."

"What do you mean? Has he met with some accident?"

"An accident of his contriving. He has been out in a duel and got wounded in the arm, but he will be none the worse after a few days' rest."

"May I learn the cause of this duel?" inquired Vivette, deeply affected.

"Oh, a wrangle in a club about some female celebrity, or rather notoriety—I believe so, for I did not see the affair—and to my great regret Olivier did not choose me for second. I might have managed the foolish quarrel and he would not be wounded; but, I repeat, it's no dangerous hurt, and I think you will soon see him——"

"A female notoriety, you say?" murmured the lady.

"Sorry to say so. How absurd! But Olivier is hasty; and besides, three years in the China seas makes one forget the nice notion of Parisian matters, or else he'd never have taken up arms for some creature who does not justify a man of honour defending her. However, he will explain the adventure himself."

"I have not the faintest wish to hear anything more about it," said Vivette, drily.

The shot had told, and, receiving it, the count profited by the occasion to turn the conversation into a more interesting channel.

"I admire your courage," said he in his most honeyed voice. "As I know, you come to defend poor Calorguen. It is heroic to quit Paris in winter and bury yourself in the depths of Brittany. I should rejoice at it were I selfish, as thus I owe the pleasure of meeting you here—unhappy I that has not uttered a word to you since the last ball of the last season, Lady Sartilly's April hop. I have not forgotten that ball, where I had three spins with you—three fully counted."

As he spoke this language, where passion was veiled under society forms, the count watched his partner with his large blue eyes till she lowered hers to avoid their jet of flame.

She had resolved to close her ears against this man's speech. She meant to forget him ; but she was not sufficiently sure of herself yet to prolong without peril an interview with Alain of Trigavou. One breath is all that is needed to revive a smouldering flame, and all contributed to render the situation dangerous. Unlucky chance had brought Vivette into the presence of the seductive waltzer whom she had fallen in love with, and there was no Olivier here to protect her against a surprise of the heart.

The sky was blue, the air warm, and the forest, yellowed by autumnal rains, wonderfully well enframed this scene, which was not rustic, for the master of Trigavou was no shepherd retailing his woes to a milkmaid. A serpent trailed under the fair flowers of his speech, and this continuator of the *roués* of superseded courts had already stung Vivette with one of those insinuations against her affianced which would have killed a rival in a mind less steadily balanced than Mdlle. de Bourbriac's.

"You do not answer me," he proceeded in a coaxing tone. "No doubt you think it ill becomes me to remind you of an evening which has slipped your recollection, and you will say that it was my own fault that I have not seen you once, as I spent the summer near your dwelling-place. An unjust reproach, because, you know, Baron Houlbecq never received me willingly. He did not like me, and I was forced to wander about on the chance of seeing you now and then at that distance where he kept me. You must do me the justice that I never tried to intrude upon you. But since my good star leads me to the very spot where you come, allow me to say—"

"Say nothing," interrupted Vivette. "I shall not believe you. Let us rather, if you please, speak of that unfortunate servant whom your farmer accuses, and whom you talk of defending, but do not speak to me of the past."

"My farmer!" exclaimed Trigavou. "Indeed, I learnt that it was he who denounced Calorguen. The rascal came up to town without my permission; I discovered him there and rated him as he deserved. He has some spite against Calorguen and slandered him to avenge himself for old grievances, but I have made him understand to what he exposed himself by bearing false witness. He asked pardon and promised me to retract, or at any rate moderate, his first deposition. If he does not keep his pledge I shall drive him from my Hunaudaie farm to go get hanged elsewhere. We have nothing to fear, therefore, in that quarter, but human justice is apt to be deceived, and I think it would be best for Calorguen not to appear at the assizes. That is why, I can tell you so, I wish he could escape, and I am going to help him do so."

"I doubt if he will consent. An innocent man does not fly—he waits to be justified or dies bravely."

"That's true; and yet I agree with that eminent judge who said if he were accused of stealing the towers of Nôtre Dame, his first act would be to run away. I know Dinan Prison since ever so long, and I affirm that it is not impossible to escape from it—with one or two devoted friends to help. But still I will abstain, if you forbid my conniving at Calorguen's breaking out."

"I have no orders to give you," said Vivette quickly, "and no wishes to express. I am convinced that Calorguen is not guilty, but I hope in heaven only for his judges to have my belief. And now, my lord, allow me to leave. I am expected elsewhere."

This tone permitted no reply. But the Count of Trigavou was too keen not to penetrate to the feelings dissimulated under crushing coldness, and too cunning to try to detain her. He saw clearly that he had made a profound impression on her, as much as he hoped from a first interview, certain not to be the last, for he reckoned on bringing about frequent meetings with General Houlbecq's sole legatee.

"Heaven forbid, young lady," he cried, "that I should impose my society any longer upon you. I have seen you now—I have heard you speak, after eight months of cruel separation—enough happiness for one day. I am going to the Hunaudaie, but shall be at Dinan to-morrow, where I shall be best placed to serve the prisoner who interests you. In any place and on all occasions I beg you to hold me at your service."

So saying, the Lord of Trigavou snatched up Vivette's hand, which she had not the presence of mind to hold aloof, kissed it respectfully, and went away by a road other than that the lady took to come from the keeper's house. She was glad he had not insisted on accompanying her, but she remained more troubled than ever.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE OLD TOWER YIELDS UP A CLUE

In vain did Vivette affect indifference, she could not quench the burning memories which suddenly were fanned once more to a blaze. And, as a climax to the disgrace, she learned that the cousin who pretended to love her sincerely, had been risking his life for some ill-famed woman who would proudly parade his name hereafter. Her betrothed betrayed her and her sister turned aloof. Ought she to credit the affection of this Count of Trigavou whom the general's widow accused of making conquests in the highest Parisian society? Her reason told her that life-partnerships were not thus happily formed without other preludes than romantic encounters and proposals offered in ballroom corners or forest nooks.

In one day passion may spring up and grow, but happiness is a fruit only worth gathering when slowly matured. She never hoped to taste it again since learning how Olivier Derquy had so speedily forgotten his engagements. She doubted, too, the sincerity of the interest put forth by the treacherous Pillemer's master for Calorguen. Was she doomed to live always thus alone, friendless, unsupported, without faith in the future? She was habituated to sacrifice herself for others, but not resigned to shower love on only objects of charity.

So she strolled along by the garden wall, with a dull eye and a lowered head, like a lost traveller who hopelessly seeks a way in the dark and perceives not the slightest guiding star on the horizon.

Thus pensive and doleful she came to the castle gates, where she remembered that she had not left the keeper's cottage merely to examine the covert where the murderer had paused a moment, but also to visit the castle never entered since her return.

Entering the open way, she spied Broladre at the further end of the walk, raking up the dead leaves. He did not see her, and before accosting him she stopped to look up at the deserted house.

Formerly this ancient abode, restored by a rich and happy purchaser, had been gay enough, but now it was as sombre as a prison and seemed to try to harmonise itself with the old tower. Life had fled from the shell and it hung out mourning for the veteran who had found death creep upon him there, though he had defied it on so many battlefields. All the blinds were drawn, all the shutters closed. Not a sound oozed forth and not a curl of smoke adorned one chimney to annoy the ravens that hovered over the donjon and alone disturbed the sinister silence by their croakings.

Such a sight was not calculated to brighten up Vivette, and her heart ached to see this dwelling mournful now, where her life had been so sweetly tranquil.

Up rose the vanished past ; the parlours where the county families flocked in, the dining-room where noisy toasts were shouted whilst the lord of the castle held up the biggest bumper. Still higher were her own rooms, lower again the general's and his wife's, which made her shudder to see.

Absorbed in her sad contemplation, she did not hear the gardener shuffle up to say, sighing :

"There you are, lady, on the identical spot where the villain stood to fire up at poor master !"

Vivette started away a few steps from where the assassin's feet had trodden the gravel. But it was not precisely true. He had stood off a bit, in an evergreen clump by the lawn, hiding, no doubt, till the mark presented itself. But he had passed hereby, and, if little Yvon was to be believed, he had come in at the gates like Vivette and followed the same road as hers

"No, no," she murmured; "Calorguen never did this abominable crime!"

"He!" exclaimed the gardener. "A man that would ha' walked into the fire for his master! Let 'em say what they like; they won't get me to believe that Pierre would ha' killed our master. It's a parcel o' scamps that have laid their heads together to get him into trouble, and he is in the lock-up sure enough, but I defy them to have him condemned."

"It's the farmer of the Hunaudaie who accuses him."

"And along o' he—Corporal Grisaille, of the gendarmes, ay, and, very likely, the son of the dead count——"

"The present Count of Trigavou? Why, Broladre, you cannot think him hostile to Calorguen, can you?"

"Well, I have got an impression that way, there!"

"At all accounts, it was not he who denounced Pierre; he was far from here when they arrested the poor fellow."

"If not him it was Pillemer, and Pillemer and my lord, bless ye, they're the hand and the glove."

Vivette was going to retort that the master of Trigavou energetically blamed his tenant farmer, but she checked herself, as she would have had to disclose her meeting the lodger at the Hunaudaie.

"Look ye here, miss," went on Broladre, "they accuse Pierre and they accuse the poachers, but I tell 'e, the scoundrel that fired that 'ere shot is a-sauntering quietly about the country and laughing a good 'un at the stupidness of the business. I don't know who he is, but I can say that plaguey strange things have been a-going on 'round this here same castle this good while. Lord, they've been making a reg'lar parade-ground of the lawn and the shrubbery, to say nothing of their monkeying up the house-wall——"

"What have you noticed?" inquired Vivette, deeply attentive.

"I never catched sight o' the beggar myself, but I am sure he's been climbing up more than once to the first story anyway, and maybe up to the second too. Just look at that ivy—look close and you'll see they've made actual cuttings like steps."

Mdlle. de Bourbriac went up to the wall and indeed saw that the ivy stem and branches were worn here and there as by strongly-shod feet frequently on the bark. On looking still more closely she remarked more of these imprints on the detached vines enwreathing Baroness Houlbecq's window. Thereupon all the memories of that fatal St. Hubert's Night rushed upon her.

The man whom her sister had besought her to conceal had entered the house by that means.

After the crime Flavia had not renewed her entreaty.

Hence the man had found means of escape.

Vivette recalled the incident of the metal plate nailed over the condemned door to the inside of the tower, but taken off some hours subsequently by the magistrate's order.

" I would like to see my room again and my sister's," she remarked to the gardener. " Have you the keys ?"

" All the keys to show the place," returned the man, eagerly, " and I'll be glad to take you round."

Indeed, the bunch was dangling at his waist, as ever since the absence of master and fellow-servants had made him steward. He mounted the main steps, opened the grand portals and stood aside to let the heiress pass. The hall crossed the house ; in its centre was the staircase.

" Nothing has been touched since my lady left," observed the old fellow. " I would not knock in a nail without your leave, since all is yours here, house and belongings."

" Ah ! who told you so ? " queried the visitor, sharply.

" Everybody says so. Rumour runs at Dinan that the baron left you everything by the will written on his death day."

" A mistake, and I authorise you to deny it," interrupted Vivette, curtly.

Broladre stared, saw in her eyes that she was not jesting, and muttered a " sorry to hear it," which clearly expressed where his liking dwelt.

"Let us go upstairs," she said, taking the lead on the stairs. On the right of the landing were the doors, the large one to Baroness Houlbecq's rooms, the other direct to her dressing-room of that suite. On the left a long lobby ran to the general's rooms, where nothing had happened on the eventful night.

Since the lady had left for town the official seals had been removed and the doors were open.

First Vivette entered the dressing-room where her sister had sprung up to bar her way when she ran in at the outcries of the domestics assembled round their master's dead body. She did not linger there, but, overruling her emotion, she passed into the chamber, where nothing was changed except by the removal of the bloodstained carpet. Flavia's bed retained the impress of her form, and the volume of Balzac remained on the side-table where the general dropped it after a glance, whilst his wife pretended to sleep.

Broladre opened the shutters. The light was so clear that the visitor could include in one glance the whole of the profoundly-affecting picture. Her gaze settled on the leaden plate remaining after being un-nailed by the roofers under the magistrate's direction.

"My poor master had better have set the plumbers to sealing up the windows," observed the gardener. "There was no danger to come from the other."

It was the contrary, thought Vivette.

"My good man," said she, "will you leave me alone to pray for the lamented departed one? Wait for me above in my room, where I will presently come."

Broladre bowed himself out.

Vivette walked straight to the hangings and lifted them, so as to see that nobody had closed the door of communication. She stepped into the place, vaulted like a cavern and feebly illumined by a loophole. It was only six feet above the floor, but was much too narrow for a man to squeeze through, and no refugee in the tower could have left by that opening.

Light had dawned on the searcher's brain, and she scarcely doubted now that, surprised by her husband, Lady Houlbecq had hidden a lover here who had got in by the window up the ivy ladder. What had he done to escape? His prison, with the ostensible door condemned, plated over, and guarded, must have had an invisible issue, for which the new-comer sought.

She remembered reading of celebrated escapes, where prisoners had saved themselves by burrowing in the thickness of their dungeon walls. Therefore she examined all the huge granite blocks, one after another, of the tower masonry till she came to one with its joints free of mortar. She gave it a chance push, and found it to give and reveal a large empty space. It was mid-high, so Vivette could have glided into it; but, instead of so perilous a venture, she was satisfied to put in her head and peer into the hollow. It was up and down, she perceived. Below, a black well without a perceptible bottom; above, a chimney ending in the platform of the dungeon, for daylight was visible, as if some cover had fallen in, or a hasty hand had removed it and forgotten to replace it.

Vivette was brave enough to reach out and grope in the interior of this perpendicular shaft, her hands meeting the stones; but some stood out with flat tops from among the rest; they were stepping-stones to facilitate ascent and descent

But she was not yet at the sum of her discoveries.

Still feeling of the rugged layers, her fingers suddenly ran against a hard round object, so cold as to make her start, but she regained her courage, grasped it, and drew it forth. It was a kind of button—properly a stud in gold, such as fastens those cuffs which no peasant wears. This half of a link-pair had been torn away by the stones when the fugitive wearer was mounting in full flight. By a rare hazard it had not fallen to the bottom of the pit.

This was a substantial proof that a gentleman had passed this way who could be no less than Lady Houlbecq's lover.

Vivette was on the verge of wondering to herself if he might not be the husband's murderer, when she perceived the stud was engraved with an armorial device and enamelled.

She knew enough of heraldry to hope to decipher it and approached the loophole in order to do so. Alas! she knew that coat-of-arms well from having seen it carved over the castle front. None but the Trigavous bore "three spread eagles in silver, two above one, on a black ground."

"'Tis he!" she muttered with a shiver, in horror. "'Twas he Flavia received that night! And yet, but now, had I not stayed him, he would have told me he loved me! And in Paris she urged me to wed him! It was merely to test me; she was jealous of me; that is why she wanted to see me no more! Well, she shall have her wish, for I will flee so far she will never hear me spoken of. Yes, I will go! But no, not before I save Calorguen. Olivier will aid me; who cares if he has been duelling about some bad woman? He has not stooped to infamy like this man! He is worthy to defend this unfortunate gamekeeper, threatened with the loss of his head for a crime he never committed. Help, help, Olivier! Oh, help! I will see him, and if he cannot come I will go to him."

After this outburst, rather thought aloud, however, than spoken, Vivette flew forth without heeding the displaced stone, ran through her sister's room, called Broladre down from the upper floor, told him she deferred seeing the rest of the castle, commanded him to shut up the baroness's room and hand her the key, which she carried away with her, and leaving by the gates, raced away to Calorguen's cottage. She had gone wild.

Her ideas battled confusedly in her brain till one rose clearly from the chaos—to put herself under Olivier's safeguard.

How summon him quickly? The post was too slow, and there was no telegraph office save at Dinan. There she esolved to go, even though the Lord of Trigavou beset her path.

On arriving at the keeper's she found Yvon squatting in his habitual place, silently watching the slumbering Mother Calorguen. She beckoned for him to come out into the orchard with her, where she asked briefly:

"Any letter-out of carriages near here?"

"Yes, lady. Two in the village, but the best only has open carts, and if it be for you——"

"I am not particular. Lead me to him."

"Going away, lady?"

"Over to Dinan, but I shall be back shortly. Tell the Sister of Charity to take my place by the patient till I return. I don't want to wake up the old dame, so steal up into my room and bring me a locked portmanteau and a little leather bag you'll find on the chest of drawers."

"What'll I say if the dame asks after you, lady?"

"That I went away to help her boy."

"Oh, won't she pray for you! If you see Pierre, lady, you'll speak to him of me, won't you now?"

"Certainly I will."

"Mind, tell him that I do not forget what I promised him, but do not tell him what I told you. I haven't come across that man yet, but I'm still on the hunt——"

"You can come to tell me all about that at Dinan, at Dr. Avangour's house. But run for that bag and make haste."

An hour afterwards Mdlle. de Bourbriac was rolling in a rattle-trap towards the town where Calorguen was awaiting the unfolding of his fate.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE SPIES IN THE STRONGHOLD

BRITTANY is strewn with small towns, nearly all picturesque. Nodding on creeks or asleep in the woods, all are set in verdure—forest, mead, or growing heath—but all also have narrow, dirty streets. Dinan has both these. Antiquaries dote on it, and the English pedestrians delight here, too, in the plenty of long pleasant walks.

Since the Revolution, when most provincial towns razed the monuments of yore, the Dinan burghers have preserved by utilising the ancient fortifications which once protected the place from the Earl of Lancaster. The moats have been transformed into boulevards planted with fine large trees, and the battlements hold up hanging gardens. The castle, built in 1388, is the prison, like many another. In the time of the Terror, refractory priests were immured here, and prisoners of war under the First Empire. Now it is a house of correction and stronghold for the prisoners to be tried at the Assizes of St. Brieuc.

The perfectly intact castle forms part of the unbroken enclosure around the town, and its imposing mass towers upon a hilltop above the river.

Here Pierre Calorguen awaited judgment, without seeing one friendly face there, six weeks. Solitary confinement had been so rigorously maintained that all Dr. Avangour could do was to send in a few comforts, without obtaining leave to see him. But now the ban was lifted and our good doctor was seeking the public prosecutor for a permit, for he was eager to question the hapless fellow. Not to wring out avowals, but to make him understand he ought not to sacrifice himself from fear of injuring a woman he loved. That he worshipped Baroness Houlbecq, the doctor was more than ever convinced, as well as that the lady of Castle Trigavou had played a still inexplicable part in the tragedy. Avangour was less interested in her than in the son of his patient, and he sought to help him best by informing him of all the doings since he was arrested. He wished chiefly to relate the suspicious conduct of Pillemer, who had gone to Paris after accusing him to confer with his master.

In the meantime, deprived of outward news, Calorguen believed himself totally abandoned. Yet, though he despaired of help, his courage never weakened. What man he was the day Grisaille arrested him he was now ; nerved to remain mute before the jury, as already before the magistrate, and leaving Providence to display his innocence if so it might be.

On the other hand, his durance was not so vile, thanks to the paternal kindness of his turnkey. This honest fellow had served in the marines and had quitted the fleet with the rank of ship's corporal.

Naturally he felt for an old soldier, and refused him none of the favours which he could grant within a warder's duty.

First, Mdlle. de Bourbriac had come to live at Dr. Avangour's, in Dinan. He was a widower of sixty, and occupied a huge house on Duguesclin Square, near the castle.

Second, came Count Trigavou, leaving the farm to dwell at the other end of the town in a lodging he took by the year, to be handy when he did business at Dinan, though that was not often.

Third, was Olivier Derquy, arrived last night by the railway, at the nearest hotel to the station. He had made an appointment there with Trigavou, who had not kept him waiting, so that a couple of days after Vivette so abruptly departed from the keeper's cottage, the two friends were walking along the outer boulevard leading to the castle.

Since Mdlle. de Bourbriac's flight, Olivier had been thoroughly ensnared by Alain's blandishments. Alain had clean won over the naval lieutenant ; his skilful remarks had scattered any suspicions in his mind, entangled him and finally led him to conclude an alliance to save Calorguen.

By a singular hazard, Olivier being involved in a quarrel at the club on his first visit, with a strange gentleman, had to fight a duel with him, when he received a thrust in the wrist. This compelled him to keep indoors a few days, and hence, in the impossibility of presenting himself at Friedland Avenue, he charged Alain to go see Lady Houlbecq, and tell her and her sister that her cousin had had a fall.

To fulfil this errand, the count had no need to put himself out, as Flavia had come to see him at his lodgings. She announced that Vivette had set out for Brittany, and then they concocted a plan which simple Olivier was to help execute without knowledge that he was working against his own interest. Lady Houlbecq feared Calorguen would speak, so she wished him out of the way—how managed she little cared. If he escaped—well, if he did, so much the better, for dead men tell no tales.

Trigavou aimed to wed the general's sole heiress, Vivette. To attain his mark he must captivate her, and he did not doubt succeeding by making a merit of defending Calorguen and employing calumny to prevent the cousins marrying. The plotters agreed that the lady should remain in the city whilst the noble went to work without her.

Already there, he believed he had only to congratulate himself upon his first interview with Mdlle. de Bourbriac. The next thing was to get rid of Calorguen, and so contrive it that Vivette would thank him for getting him out of jail.

After receiving him with open arms, Alain had taken him in hand. They were going together to study the place into which they sought to enter for communication with the prisoner, and Alain reserved to himself the direction of operations.

"Did they raise any obstacles at the sub-prefecture to giving you the leave to visit ?" he inquired, as they neared the

St. Louis gate, which must be passed in order to get into the town and then the fortalice.

"None," was Olivier's answer. "The only remark was that it was good but to three o'clock. But it is scarce two now."

"Oh, we have time enough, through my having sent you to the office instead of myself going. The clerks there know me and they would have been astonished at a native asking to see local curiosities, whilst they could take you for a tourist."

"I daresay; but the leave is only for the castle, and the hour stated is probably that when the prisoners are locked up."

"I did not imagine they would let us see Calorguen or I should not have come, for his prejudices against me would have made him distrustful. We are only a simple scout to examine the place, draw out the jailer and try to learn where our man is lodged, and whether we can get anything to him. I charge myself willingly with this preliminary inquiry."

"Well, will we be much advanced afterwards?"

"My dear boy, this is my idea. You see that dungeon," went on the count, pointing to the huge tower standing out from the line over the moat. "Calorguen is there, rely upon it, and he could get out by filing the window bars and sliding down a rope. The sole puzzle is to put him in possession of the indispensable tools, a file and a cord. 'Tis the traditional style, the plainest and also the best. Read your Jack Sheppard."

"I remember some such things, and I know that Dinan Castle is not as well guarded as a state prison. Still I doubt that the prisoners will be allowed to receive anything from outsiders."

"So do I. But let me see how things really stand. Jailers may be bribed. Let's try, anyway, my friend. It is fully understood that you are a Dryasdust, travelling to see old monuments, and have beguiled me into accompanying you. On the way I'll try to unloosen the warder's tongue. Do the same, and between us we ought to worm out useful information."

They returned into the town by the St. Louis gate and took the little Wicket Street, which name shows it leads to the prison. To reach it they had to cross a square and a single-arch stone bridge, preceded by a guard-house, where a sentinel let them by on seeing their permission. They were moving towards the bridge when they met a man in a dark blue uniform who stopped short on seeing Derquy, quickly doffed his gold-banded cap, and said:

"I hope I see your honour well, lieutenant. Don't you recollect me?" As Olivier looked hard without answer, he went on with a strong Provençal accent: "Why, I served under your honour's orders aboard o' the iron-clad *Magenta* what time you were midshipman and I were master of the ship's police. I am Marius Roquevaire, of Toulon."

"What, is this you, my honest tar!" cried Derquy "May Davy Jones' locker be my coffin if I expected to find you here! Have you left the navy?"

"Forced to, lieutenant; put on the reserve list. But I was lucky enough to get into the prison department, and I am head warden at Dinan. Not that I would not sooner be in my own part, Provence, but I had no choice. Besides, Brittany is not a bad country. You hail from hereabouts, I believe, lieutenant?"

"I do, and come home after three years' active service in China."

"What can I do to help your honour, lieutenant—or is it captain?—for since I left the service you ought to have gained a step."

"I have shipped the two swabs—right. This gentleman is with me. Can you tell us to whom we apply to be shown round the castle?"

"I'm your man, captain, and only too happy to show you all alow and aloft. The door-ward is away and I am taking his post."

"I have a leave."

"Oh, I don't want to see any leave where your honour's concerned. You have hit it off to a T. The prisoners are in the workroom. I can take you around in every mortal place, even the place of execution."

"Thanks, we are not over-eager about that."

"I see; you come for the antics."

"The antiquities, yes, and for the view off the tower roof."

"Ay, and that's well worth the trouble of climbing eight-and-forty steps."

The chief turnkey led them over the bridge, said a word to the watcher at the door, and the gentlemen followed him into the stairway.

They passed the doors without entering where the tourists always go in, and after an easy enough ascent came out upon the tower top.

Here was an admirable view of town and country. The old ragged roof-trees bristled on the background and the wooded slopes rose up opposite along the courses of the Rance. But the site has an untamed air not devoid of charm, a mediæval landscape where the steam whistle astonishes the hearer.

"Here we are, gentlemen," said Rocquevaire. "The travellers think a lot of it, but I stick to it that this panorama don't touch the view of the mountains of Lestorel seen from Cannes."

Olivier pretended not to be of that opinion, and uttered a well-feeling eulogy of the spectacle, as it was necessary he should pose as an enthusiast to explain his visit to the tower platform. Naval officers who have sailed round the world are not usually so curious.

"I don't reckon your prisoners so very unhappy when they have the belvidere to stroll about upon."

Thus Alain, which caused Rocquevaire to laugh.

"That's not allowed," said he. "Besides, they would rather have a treat of brandy or tobacco in the canteen. The chaps here think no more of the beauties of nature than I do of an old quid—bar one. He's used to living in the open air, d'ye see, and he's a first-class fellow, though it's a black mark agin' his name on the list. I have let him come up here for a couple of hours daily, but I stick to him all the while."

"What's he done?" inquired Trigavou.

"He was a soldier who became a gamekeeper, and he's logged down for the killing of his master."

"Stop a bit! I heard of this—or the newspapers had it—an old general who lived near here and was shot dead—quite an event, it appears. So you have that criminal here, eh?"

"Until shifted for the 'sizes next month. Whether they let him off or not, I'm sorry he's going. You'll see why, captain, when I tell 'ee we have a talk every day about the war through which the pair of us went."

The naval officer fully understood and rejoiced to find the head warder so well disposed towards the prisoner. For still better luck, Rocquevaire, not being a native, was completely ignorant that his former commander was a relation by marriage of Baron Houlbecq. All he knew was that Derquy was a Breton, and he could not infer from that that he thought of saving Calorguen.

"The poor fellow interests you, eh?" observed Olivier.

"Ay, captain, and more besides. Everybody's sorry for him, and Dr. Avangour, who is the first doctor in Dinan and attended the general, of course, often sends Calorguen eatables and drinkables. Catch him a-doing that if he believed him guilty! More'n that, too, he's coming to see him. The 'solitary' has been taken off these two days and the doctor must have got the order to visit; in fact, I wonder he's not here to-day."

"Quite right of the doctor," Alain said, at the same time, "to alleviate the fate of a man who has fought for his country. It's an example to follow. Let us send in a basket of dainties."

"Can we, though?" asked he directly of the chief turnkey who replied lightly:

"Dead agin' the rules and reggylations, but I can shut my eyes on a present from my old officer."

"I'll take you at your word, old shipmate," said Derquy. "What do you think he'd like?"

"Oysters, of course," interposed Trigavou. "I don't think he's indulged in them in here. They'll make a new man of him, I'll bet, and a bottle or two of sound white wine to wash them down. What do you think of that, Master Warder?"

"No wine, sir. I have had my head dressed because I passed in three bottles of old bordeaux from Dr. Avangour's own cellar. He sent them into the canteen and Calorguen pretended to buy 'em out there. But as for oysters, send in as many as you like."

"He shall have a full barrel this evening."

"Send in before four p.m. After dark nothing can come in; it is the rule and reggylation."

"I'll attend to it as soon as I get back to my hotel," said Olivier. "And I hope, old mate, that you'll do me the pleasure of coming to breakfast with me in the morning."

"That would be a great honour, captain, but the prison inspector is expected to drop on us any time, so I cannot get out. Are you staying long down here?"

"Not coming to an anchor. I have got through my business almost, but I shall come back when we can see one another. Now I have no time to spare about that keg of oysters, and we must put off to the next time visiting the halls."

"Have it your own way, captain. But if Calorguen asks who sent him the treat——"

"Just say it was a sea officer. Well, yes; there's nothing to stay you giving my name."

"That's good enough, sir. Calorguen will drink your honour's health, and so shall I."

Roquevaire escorted the two gentlemen to the guard-house, where he stopped to light his pipe. The visitors strode away smartly till they passed St. Louis gate, where Alain exclaimed:

"It strikes me, old fellow, that we have done good work, thanks to you. This comes of being under arms; you're sure to meet some old comrade everywhere. Did not this turnkey fall into the snare easily? Now it depends upon Master Calorguen alone to be off this very night!"

# CHAPTER XXXI

## THE DOCTOR'S OBSTINATE PATIENT

"I TELL you, Olivier, Calorguen could get out this very night, but I do not hope for so quick a success, though I already see how to do it. The shellfish will be packed over a false-bottomed receptacle, hiding files, hooks, and a knotted rope of the due length, so the jailers will see nothing."

"How will Calorguen know it, then?"

"Rest easy as to that. Knowing the present comes from you he will imagine there is something else among the bivalves. The sequel is his own affair. He is strong enough to lower himself down hand under hand and able to find his way when on the ground. He knows the land, every inch, and, reaching the coast, can pay some fisherman to transport him to Jersey. He shall have funds enough, for I will lay a roll of fifty louis beside the rope and files."

Still Derquy remained unshaken.

"My dear friend," went on Trigavou, "I cannot promise all will happen as I plan. But nothing venture, nothing win comes pat here. I can engage, though, that if Calorguen stands his trial he will be sentenced to death, whatever Dr. Avangour, the optimist, may aver. And Heaven knows what complications the case will yield, even if there be no necessity for your cousins to attend. They ought to wish, if anybody does, for Calorguen to disappear before the jury is called."

"They have nothing to fear, as they can reproach themselves with nothing."

"Of course not. But a drowning man clutches at every straw. Calorguen, feeling lost, may try to extenuate the crime by declaring he had accomplices within the castle."

"What accomplices? My cousins, do you mean? No one will credit that."

"An odious assertion, I know; but don't it occur to you that people would wonder why they worry about General Houlbecq's assassin? Particularly Mdlle. Vivette, who came down here expressly to raise heaven and earth on behalf of the man—living at his own mother's house, by the same token. Whence her excessive zeal? Shall I acknowledge, my dear Olivier, this is a question that puzzles me? It will rise on others and they will explain her singular conduct malevolently."

This cunningly-guided thrust hit a tender point. Derquy did not believe that Mdlle. de Bourbriac had any affection for the keeper, as Trigavou seemed to insinuate; but slander always sticks and the count was a past-master in the art of sowing suspicions. He had already succeeded in leading Mdlle. de Bourbriac to believe that her cousin had fought for some disreputable woman, and now he endeavoured to embroil both the betrothed.

Derquy finally accepted this announcement, anxious as he was to be alone to muse over Alain's perfidious speech, a Parthian shaft that almost accused Vivette of being too fond of Calorguen.

They separated at about the same time as good-hearted Roquevaire left the guard-house to go up to Calorguen's cell to announce an oyster supper. But it was decreed that he should never go up there by himself that day. Whilst he was knocking the ashes out of his pipe, who should appear at the end of Wicket Street but Dr. Avangour, grave as ever and pacing along solemnly.

"Good!" thought Roquevaire. "He has got the leave to see Calorguen. I'll take him up myself so as to profit by the chance to tell Pierre he can have a rare junketing this evening."

The doctor politely presented an authorisation signed by the senior judge.

"Quite right, surgeon-major!" cried Roquevaire, eagerly. "I'll see you up to my lodger, who will jump out of his collar to see you. I'll leave you alone with him for half an hour. Not according to the rules and reggylations, but I know a gentleman a mile off. You would not cause a fellow to lose his berth."

"Never fear, my honest man," replied Avangour. "I shall tell nobody you stretched a point, and more than one will be grateful for your kindness, myself principally. Everybody's interested in your prisoner, even to the magistrate who sent him to the assizes."

"Ay, and outsiders too," added Roquevaire.

The doctor did not take up the remark, for its meaning escaped him, but followed the keeper up the tower stairs. He swung a formidable ring of keys as he conducted him to the third story, where he opened a massive door noisily, as prison doors are always opened in the old style of jail, garnished with enormous locks and bristling with bolts.

Calorguen, seated on a stool before a coarse wooden table, was reading a book lent by his present visitor. He sprang up quickly and came straight to the one faithful friend in his misfortune.

"Good news, my boy," said the turnkey. "To begin with, you are no longer to be in solitary confinement, in token of which here's a caller whom I'm going to lock up with you, so you can chatter away at ease. Next, you are going to have fivescore oysters, and I'll send you up from the canteen a good bottle of Valette, a wine they grow round Nantes—not so good as Capres, a Provence vintage, but worth drinking, though."

"I shall not say no to the liquor," muttered Calorguen, "but before I touch oysters I want to know where they come from."

"Two visitors to the castle heard you spoken of, and they thought of doing the kind thing."

"Not acquaintances of yours, though, eh?"

"Well, I know one of them. I served under him on the *Magenta*, when he was a midshipman. Now he is a first lieutenant—a captain, as we call 'em—a Breton gentleman named M. Derquy."

"Oh, I have seen him at Trigavou in the old days. So he remembered me?"

"No, he never let out a word of that. But you are a fellow-Breton and have served under the flag, enough to fetch out the core of the cable. It would be lubberly to refuse his offering. Now," concluded Roquevaire, consulting a huge silver watch, "you have five-and-twenty minutes to talk of your affairs with the doctor, who will excuse me not giving you more time; but there's the rules and reggylations, d'ye see!"

So saying the head jailer stalked forth, banged the door even more loudly than before, and shot the bolts outside. The doctor had let him go without asking further of the other visitors.

"M. Derquy is a kinsman of Mdlle. de Bourbriac," muttered Calorguen.

"Her cousin german," said the doctor. "I had no idea he was in Dinan."

"I thought he was in China."

"He returned. I saw him lately in Paris, at Lady Houlbecq's."

"Then you have seen her ladyship too?" exclaimed the captive.

"In her residence in Friedland Avenue, the first time since she came to see you at your mother's, an hour before your arrest."

"Did she speak about m—me?"

"Very slightly. We were not alone. And if I had reminded her ladyship of her visit to you on her husband's funeral day I believe it would have distressed her. So I pretended forgetfulness of your long colloquy with her in the orchard."

"She ought to bless you for not saying anything."

"I don't doubt that; and I shall continue to keep silent. But I do not renounce discovering the truth—indeed, I ask it of you—I come for nothing else."

"I swear to you under God that I am not the man who slew the general. Were it me I'd tell you so."

"Good! I believe you. Now, answer with the same precision to another question I must put to you: Lady Houlbecq loves you?"

"Not that I know of."

"But you are in love with her, at least? Don't contradict it! I am sure, and you would deny uselessly. I have eyes and I have seen."

"I do not deny that."

"Well and good so far. Have you told her you loved her?"

"No, she found it out."

"Then she commanded you to kill her husband?"

"But I tell you it was not I who killed him."

"Do you know the other?"

"Did I know I should tell you—when nothing less would save my head. But I do not know, and Lady Houlbecq does not know either."

"What did she come to you for, then? And what did you want of her that you begged for an interview—not to propose marriage, I imagine? Admit there is a secret between you."

Calorguen bowed his head unanswering.

"Come, come," said the physician, "be frank. You discovered my lady had a gallant. She knew you could destroy her and she came to entreat you to keep still."

"I promised her as much," replied the gamekeeper with an effort.

"I guessed it. And this paramour killed the husband?"

"No, I am certain not."

"How can you be certain?"

"He died before my master did; hence it was not he."

"Name him."

"I swore to do nothing of the sort, and will not be for-sworn. Besides, what matters that man's name now? Were he living and I free I should try to force him to fight me, for I hate him, curse him! But I did not betray him before his death, and out of respect for my commander's memory I will not disgrace Lady Houlbecq by publishing that she deceived her husband."

"My dear Pierre, I deplore your obstinacy, but I cannot blame your sentiments. Guilty though a woman may be, she is ever a woman; and besides, this one is Mdlle. Vivette's sister——"

"One I respect and bless. Never can I forget her kindness to my mother, sir."

"There's more of it than you know of. A week ago Mdlle. Vivette came to live at your mother's the better to watch her, and her settling down there was also to defend you better. She is collecting testimony to your good character, and will herself try her good word at the trial. But I must know how you are going to act, and what your answer will be to the indictment. I hope the jury will be well disposed towards you, but all appearances are counter. What is your plan of defence?"

"None. A man not guilty needs no plots and plans. I am ready. I should have liked to see my mother, though."

"You well know she cannot be moved, though she is getting on better. I hope to have her about in the spring. Mdlle. de Bourbriac wanted to come here with me, but I made her understand it would not be seemly. You will see her in the court-room. I shall return once more for anything you want attended to."

"Do you know if little Yvon will be called as a witness?"

"That little lad who watched your mother? Really, I cannot say. I rather think, though, he'll be wanted to tell what hour you came home on the evening when the crime was committed. But why the mischief do you think of him? Half an idiot, poor child! His presence cannot be of any use to you."

"I'd like him to be there."

"Very well, you can have him summoned as a witness for the defence."

The doctor was interrupted by a crash of iron. The door opened and the chief warder entered, saying :

"Time's up, sir, and I am called down."

"I was just going," said Dr. Avangour. "Good-bye, Pierre, till we meet again in three days."

He held out his hand to the prisoner, which he had not done in entering. Pierre grasped it and shook it with gladness, feeling that he believed him now free of the murder.

"The oysters have come," said Roquevaire, chuckling. "Your friends wasted no time. There's a bushel basket, boy, none of your trumpery kegs, and it's coming up with a bottle of wine. I'll open two or three dozen myself, as you're not allowed a knife under the rules and reggylations. Better tuck 'em under your belt straight off, for night comes on sharp, and the government won't run up any tall gas bills for its guests. Ha ! ha !"

With this laughing at his own jokes the honest jailer left the dungeon.

Calorguen resumed his seat on the stool and leaned an elbow on the table, heeding in no way the banquet. He thought of Lady Houlbecq coming to St. Brieuc, where he would see her again. Dr. Avangour had hit it ; the keeper was not cured of his fatal passion. He cursed the lady of Trigavou Castle ; he scorned her, yet he loved her. Her image floated before his eyes. She figured in all the prisoner's dreams as she appeared under the apple trees supplicating him pitifully to give up the paper which put her at his mercy. He regretted not having been able to gratify her wishes. He was determined to let himself be doomed rather than bring her into the case, and the doctor's wise counsel had not modified his resolution.

He was driven out of his broodings by Roquevaire coming in with an underling bringing the oysters and wine. It was no plaything of a keg, but a huge basket filled to bursting off the lid, and the porter had his strength tasked to carry it.

"Put that down in a corner and set the bottle on the table, and sling your hook elsewhere," said his superior. "Now, then, lad," he proceeded, when the 'prentice warder had gone, "you must do honour to my old commander's present. Keep your seat. I will show you how to open oysters artistically. You notice that I had a glass brought up for me—so fill up both for a drink."

Calorguen obeyed mechanically, whilst the other pulled out a large clasp knife and dexterously opened quite four dozen Cancale oysters, which he arranged appetisingly before the prisoner—and himself.

"There's enough for this evening," he said. "You can have a go at the rest to-morrow, and if too many I'll lend you a hand. I have to swallow going on a hundred before I can raise an appetite, sometimes; a lucky thing, as you do not seem up to much. Here's your jolly good health."

Indeed, Calorguen did not evince great gusto for the bivalves which disappeared between the other's lips with startling rapidity, Roquevaire only pausing to drink, so that when he had engulfed his third dozen the bottle was drained.

"Now, my lad, I am feeling sharpset for my dinner. Oh, I'll send you up your soup. I'll leave the basket, for you may care to taste in the night. We'll finish 'em to-morrow. I'd like to leave you a light, but you know that's dead agin' the rules and reggylations."

Upon which Roquevaire walked out and the fastenings closed upon Calorguen, again sinking into his meditation. He could not help smiling at the frank gluttony of his keeper, who regaled himself under pretence of treating his prisoner better.

But Calorguen soon ran on to graver thoughts. Among Roquevaire's remarks was one hugely suggestive on which he fastened, that baskets may contain other things than oysters.

"May not M. Derquy have sent me in tools?" he thought to himself. "I never saw much of him when he came to our place, but then he is a kinsman of Lady Houlbecq and her sister—their cousin, I hear. They have spoken to him about me and begged him to go to my assistance. There, I was upbraiding my lady for forgetting me, and maybe I was wrong—she has every reason to wish I disappeared before trial. She is afraid of my speaking out. I will show her how wrong was she to distrust me, for I would not escape if I had the power."

At first indignant against the baroness for the intentions he attributed to her, he now wondered if they were not different from his conception.

Why should not the lady sincerely pity him ? And why not have charged her cousin to deliver the man suffering for her cause ? Whether she believed him innocent or guilty, she ought to be grateful for his having revealed nothing at the examination. And if she wished to restore him to freedom, had he any right to refuse it ? He might reasonably suppose that she had everything ready to facilitate his flight from France.

Then, again, a final fancy, hardly breathed to himself—might she not receive him somewhere abroad ? This imagination galloped afar out of doors, but bodily flight was not so easy.

His cell was at the tower top, with one window of good size, but cross-barred with iron. It would take a cold chisel to work them out of the leaded sockets and a rope to descend. Admitting that these articles were in the panier, they could not be unburied from beneath the shell fish till after the jailer's night visit.

So he killed two hours in prowling up and down the room, once the guard-room for the watch who mounted the roof by turns. The walls were made of stones, disjointed by time, and the rain-rusted ironwork did not appear very strong.

Here was hope.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE DEAD SHOT AT WORK AGAIN

CALORGUEN'S warder came up sooner than usual, set down a bowl of soup, and conscientiously locked up afterwards.

Familiar with "the rules and regulations" dinned into his ears by the chief guardian, Calorguen knew he should see nobody till the morning. He threw himself on the camp-bed and waited. He had no sleepiness and could do nothing until the castle gates were closed and the watchers all a-bed, save the one standing guard over the dormitories.

Calorguen's chimeras haunted his over-excited brain more and more, so that he was glad to jump off the couch when the old tower clock struck nine and stride to the corner where the basket stood. To empty it was an easy, but long, operation, as each oyster had to be taken out separately, for upsetting the whole would make a crash and a rattling on the stone floor.

Calorguen took the prudent course, softly removing the layers of shells and finally a bed of seaweed, under which his fingers touched a wicker lid bending under pressure. Here was a hiding-place, which he hastened to search. The first object produced was a candle rolled in a piece of paper. As that was useless without fire he dived deeper, and fished up a box of matches. The friend sending help had foreseen everything.

Calorguen was careful not to strike a light till he had stopped up the keyhole with the crumb of his supper loaf, for an active keeper might apply his eye to it. Besides, he was warily emptying the basket whilst stooping behind his bed.

At length he lit up and saw that the basket bottom was filled by a coil of rope, a rather thin but apparently stout one, regularly knotted. In the heart of the serpentine coil was a fine, strong file, a pair of pincers and a pair of cutter's shears. He had the choice of three courses—to file, wrench out, or dig out the window bars.

His friend, the prisoner thought, could only be Lieutenant Derquy, and he was evidently inspired by Lady Houlbecq.

Looking closer, Calorguen perceived that the candle wrap was pencilled upon. He hastened to unfold the crumpled page and read as follows:

"A well-wisher, who knows you are not guilty, sends you means to get out of confinement. The rope has been measured and tested, being strong enough to bear you and long enough to enable you to reach the ground when at its end. Lower yourself at midnight. A guide awaits you on the castle walk to take you to St. Lunaire, where a fishing smack is ready to sail to Jersey. Do not put off flight this night, as to-morrow it will be too late. Burn this."

"A well-wisher," muttered Calorguen, after reading this invitation with unspeakable emotion. "'Tis she! and the guide awaiting me at the tower foot is her cousin, M. Derquy. And I accused her of forgetting me—she who has never ceased to think of me!"

He kissed the paper he was commanded to destroy. He could not compare the handwriting with that of the terrible note which Lady Houlbecq had thrown out to him in the castle grounds on the morrow of St. Hubert's day, but he believed it was the same, and hesitatingly burnt it in the candle after having twice more perused it. One autograph of the baroness was ample keepsake. The other was in safe keeping, and this might fall into evil hands in case the prisoner was caught or killed in climbing down. In such a case, the paper would be found by persons sure to lay it before the police.

Having parried this peril by destroying the note, Calorguen only thought of obeying it.

He had two hours to prepare in. He began work by the longest and hardest task, the dislodgement of the window bars, too thick for filing. Standing on his stool, he went at them with his chisel. He soon discovered that the masonry did not hold them very firmly. Years and rains had rendered the stone friable and rusted the metal, so he had no great difficulty in "unshipping the bars," as Roquevaire would have said, by using his tool as a lever after digging out the cement and lead and enlarging the cracks. In less than an hour this was done with all but one upright, left intact for the rope to be fastened to. With a final wrench he turned the whole grate round on this centre bar like an axle, so that the horizontal bars stuck out and in, leaving room enough for a man to pass tolerably smoothly.

The rope, examined minutely, was knotted from end to end and topped by a steel ring. This he slipped over one of the bars up to the angle with the cross; he passed the free end of the rope through the next space and let it slowly glide down along the outside of the wall. There could be no give, though as well-built a man as our prisoner stretched it.

Whilst awaiting the indicated hour he could only employ the time in smoothing over things.

He pocketed the chisel, shears, and pincers preparatory to serving the candle the same way; he stuffed the seaweed into the false bottom as if it were only a little fraud of the fishmonger and piled a-top all the oysters.

It is true the displaced grating could not be pushed back and the rope would remain; but nothing would show that the necessary tools had come in the basket, which the keepers, to avoid a charge of connivance, would no doubt kick out of the way before the governor came to inspect.

All these precautions taken, Calorguen again cherished the delusions intoxicating his mind since liberty was in prospect. He reproached himself for even having doubted Lady Houlbecq's sympathy and did not think to curse her now. He loved her.

His amorous reverie was cut short by the clang of the bell striking midnight. Nothing less would have reminded the prisoner he must be up and doing.

He glanced at the repacked basket, made sure that nothing appeared about the cell beyond the shells opened and cleared by Roquevaire, put out the candle, shoved it into his pocket together with the box of matches, and climbed up on the stool on his table drawn under the window.

The moon was new in the first quarter, the sky cloudy, the night black, and a cold drizzle falling, disagreeable weather made for an escape, by which Calorguen hastened to profit.

He hoisted himself into the aperture and went out backwards, after seizing the rope with both hands. It was no easy task, but he was as agile as strong.

He withstood the shock of swinging himself down outside and began to lower himself slowly and methodically. All went well at the start. Hanging close to the wall, the rope did not quiver much, and the darkness which shielded him from surprise also preserved him from that greater danger of giddiness which sometimes perturbs the soundest heads. He saw nothing save the dark, rugged stonework scraped by his body, and staring down to see what progress he was making would have availed him little, for he could not pierce the gloom.

Down he went and felt no fatigue.

Once, though, he all but let go the cord, startled by the sudden rush out of an owl from its hole in the wall. The bird nearly blinded him with a flap of his wings, but he speedily recovered from the alarm and soon again believed he was at his journey's end.

As clearly as he could remember, the tower was not much higher than the spire of the clock tower, where the bell still hangs, given to the town by the Duchess Anne.

Calorguen rarely came to Dinan, and when he did lost no time in measuring the height of steeples and towers. Hence he was not very certain on the distance still to pass before landing; but he need only continue till his feet touched.

Before then, however, his hands joined on the rope forced out a piece of stone, which fell down into the moat. He heard it dash on the rocks and rebound, and was astonished at the number of seconds before the end of the fall.

"I am not so far down as I imagined," he muttered between his teeth.

He also marvelled that no guarded vocal signal had yet reached his ears. "A guide awaits you on the castle walk," was written by the friendly sender of the basket, probably Lieutenant Derquy. If he were below, why no token of life to encourage the wretch dangling in mid-air? There was no need to roar out at the top of the lungs. The voice ascends and a moderate tone would reach him.

For an instant the fugitive paused, and to get a look twisted himself to be face outwards. He saw nothing and concluded that the earth was not near. Almost instantly, feeling for the next lowest knot, his feet could find none. Calorguen believed he blundered, but a renewal of the experiment had the same result. He was at the end of the rope, really too short by upwards of eight yards. He shuddered and involuntarily shut his eyes. But he did not relinquish his hold. He had the presence of mind, moreover, to haul himself up so that his feet could rest on the last knot. He had escaped the peril of dropping so far as to smash his skull, but the position was not long tenable.

He thought he had best call out.

"Are you there?" he challenged, risking everything at so critical a point.

"Yes," answered a voice, apparently afar. "All right—only six feet off the ground. Let go!"

Very little more and Calorguen would have obeyed, for he had no idea it was a snare, but he thought that, without any evil intention, his friend might have miscalculated and then any error about the proper length of rope would cost the fugitive dear. So he decided not to drop before full information.

"So dark I cannot see you," he replied. "Come to the foot of the wall and you can touch my feet if it's only six feet. Then I'll be sure you were right, and I'll run the risk."

No answer this time.

Calorguen fell to wondering on the meaning of this call to chance the space, and on the subsequent silence. Who was he dealing with? Was the supplier of instruments to break jail some betrayer? He waited still, but as nothing happened he was constrained to believe with terror that there was nothing for it but to climb up again to avoid the fate projected by this false friend.

This was no such easy matter that he could rely on reaching his cell window. At the first trial he found he had a little too much presumed on his strength, though not on his spirit.

The rope burned his hands; his strained arms were stiff; the blood flew to his head, and his eyes, fatigued by the darkness, blinked despite his will.

Yet he ascended somehow by fits and starts, pausing at every knot to recover breath. He was bound not to perish at the feet of the scoundrel who awaited his fall. He wished to survive for vengeance. How he knew not, but he swore to make the organiser of this odious ambush pay dear for the criminal scheme.

Indignation gave him power and for a while he mounted rapidly. Again stayed, he listened, but no sound arose. Had the speaker quitted his post? Calorguen fancied so and went on climbing. He felt that this was his last effort, but also knew the window was not far. He was even attaining it when he heard a faint report, coinciding with the ping of a bullet on the tower stones.

"He sees I am getting out of his clutches and tries to make sure of me," said Calorguen to himself. "Luckily he missed me."

Almost instantly a second shot went off. This time the marksman took better aim. Calorguen was hit!

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE REVULSION FROM LOVE TO HATRED

At the second shot Calorguen felt a deadened pain on the thigh, as from a blow with a club. This is the ordinary effect from a flesh wound by a bullet, as he knew from experience, having received two at Metz. He knew also that a stunning sensation quickly spreads and would disable the limb. Before it refused service he must make the uttermost effort. So he grasped the bar with both hands to which he had fastened the rope. He had more difficulty in getting one knee on the window sill and then the other; once so far, he wormed himself forward flat and managed to turn. Finally, he descended into his cell upon the stool, itself upon the table.

He limped to the bed, on which he sat to examine his wound by the light of the candle which he took out of his pocket to light. He saw that the lead had probably struck the shears, so as to glance along in the flesh, carrying away the skin, a long raw wound which would heal quickly.

He washed the flayed spot with water from the jug, tore up his handkerchief for bandage, and found relief from this summary dressing. Nevertheless, he had narrowly escaped. Only by a miracle had he missed breaking his head on the rocks, thanks to the fall of the stone warning him by its duration of descent. And the villain who had laid the snare by sending him too short a rope had tried to bring him down with his revolver.

Who had conceived so black a design and prepared its execution with such infernal skill? This was the victim's first question. There was no doubt the present came from Lieutenant Derquy. But it was presumable he did not know the contents of the basket, and it was not he who waited to see the prisoner die at the dungeon base. Calorguen knew little of him, but he would not accept the supposition that the assassin was an officer and a gentleman. The lieutenant was the unconscious tool of some enemy of the gamekeeper's, cunning and ferocious. Derquy, desirous to bestow a token of kindness on the prisoner, had applied to somebody in the town for oysters, and the basket had passed through several hands before arrival at the jail.

Whose hands? What made this ill-chosen go-between hate the recipient so much as to plot his death? Calorguen was next to unknown in Dinan before the tragic occurrence published his name. And to believe the doctor and head warder, public opinion was not hostile to him. Therefore the ambush was not laid by any townsman, but by another.

Had Calorguen but known that the Lord of Trigavou was not dead, he would have sought no further. But this was not in his ken, no more than that the count accompanied Derquy into the jail.

Through many reflections, one bitter memory returned to the unhappy fellow—his joy at thinking Lady Houlbecq had tried to help his flight. He had blessed her on finding the rope and instruments in the basket sent by her cousin. He had dreamt of seeing her once more; he had reproached himself for accusing her of indifference; he had striven to persuade himself that she was not responsible to man or under heaven for the crime committed by some stranger, and he had admired the ingenious means invented by her to deliver this poor worm adoring a star.

His decision to risk life in escaping sprang from the hope to meet again out of France the noble dame who pitied his plight.

And lo! the help hid a frightful plot! Did it come from her, as he believed when making his attempt? Excellent were the reasons found to convince him she had alone devised the evasion—sound reasons now, after the event. Calorguen poised them one by one, and hurried to the same conclusion that Lady Houlbecq sent letter and present. Only, instead of seeking to save the man who sacrificed himself for her, she had intended to destroy him. It was the simplest and surest way to close his mouth and suppress the sole witness whom he dreaded.

Lady Houlbecq was a monster.

The veil spread by mad passion was suddenly rent away. Calorguen's heart shrank up and he regretted he had not let himself be killed on the rocks. He cursed her now, and little cared to know who was this wretch's accomplice waiting at the foot of the tower—some new lover or hireling assassin, perhaps.

He persisted in believing that Lieutenant Derquy had only played a passive part and was not really in the plot.

He even purposed preventing evil consequences to the naval officer, if it were discovered he had been concerned. If Roquevaire saw the unset grating and the rope attached thereto, he would divine without trouble that the implements had come in the basket sent by M. Derquy.

"Roquevaire shall see nothing," muttered Calorguen, through his grinding teeth. "Perhaps he would hold his tongue for fear of getting hauled over the coals for neglect, but the best course and the surest is to clear everything away."

He thought no more of his wound, which really was light enough to be concealed. If it went bad instead of healing, Dr. Avangour could be called in and told everything, for he wanted his opinion. With no more reservations to make, Calorguen might well let this honourable gentleman into his confidence about his strange nocturnal adventure. Perhaps he would have yielded, too, to the doctor's urging him to make a clean breast of all to the jury.

The gamekeeper commenced putting back things to their usual state. The basket was already stuffed with the bivalves. The grating was next to be replaced—not too hard a job, as it was only partly unset and was neither filed nor wrenched away. First he pulled up the rope and took the ring off the bars. Then he drew the grating inwards on the pivots of the unloosened upright bar. This succeeding, he cemented the ends in the socket with bread-crumbs stained with rust and smeared with the lime-dust.

Now the rope. Hide it under the bed? The sweeper would find it. Lay it between the mattrass and bed? To be found a little later. Burn it by the candle? Nonsense! it would take an age, and the smoke, ashes, and smell would betray him.

On full consideration, he deemed it best to throw it out of the window to fall into the ditch, full of mud in winter and covered with weeds and thistles all the year round. Nobody would go after it there, and, if found, nothing would denote it had come from the dungeon top.

Out it went, therefore, followed by the file, chisel, pincers, and shears. It did occur to him that the rascal who had shot him might remain on the look-out on the castle walk; but even then, his design being baffled, he would not lumber himself with articles purchased by him of some shopkeeper who would identify him.

The candle alone remained, and not much of that.

He used it to inspect his cell to make sure no traces remained. He found only oyster-shells left by Roquevaire, and, after putting in their places the table and stool, he blew out the candle and sent it to keep company in the moat with the other presents.

He kept the box of matches as possibly useful, for Roquevaire let him smoke cigarettes, and he could stand to it they came from the canteen.

All this done, he closed the movable glazed sash, keeping out the weather behind the bars, which he had taken off to allow his passing, and, returning to the pallet, lay down dressed, so as not to stain the sheets with blood. Useless precaution, for the wound did not bleed at all; but Calorguen was bent on hiding all clue to the night's events.

Of course he could not sleep. Wakefulness is a prisoner's worst torture. The unfortunate man tossed about on the bed, not filled with rose leaves. Day seemed never coming, and slumber likewise shrank aloof.

Finally, a faint gleam did steal through the bars and the cold, grey, wintry day dawned. Calorguen rose and set to walking up and down to warm himself and invigorate his stiffened, benumbed leg. At least it would bear him, the wound was so insignificant, and he did not doubt now it would heal of itself.

The chief warder would look in about nine and Dr. Avangour promised to return in three days. He had nothing to say to the former, but he meant to tell the doctor everything and consult him on his future action. He felt unable to come to any resolution otherwise, and he knew the assizes were at hand.

Roquevaire came up an hour earlier than usual, and it was clear that his humour had changed over-night. He showed a scowling face, announcing no good, and said bluntly :

"It's to-day."

"What's to-day ?" asked the prisoner.

"Your removal to St. Brieuc. I have just got the judge's transfer order. Get ready for the 10.36 train, to get in at 1.47."

"What ! this morning ! and my trial not before January ?"

"It will come off immediately ; set down as a special case."

"I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, you hear of it now. Your business has made such a noise that they want to get it over. And besides, the wiseacres think you are not guarded securely here," added the warder, ill-humouredly. "You have too many friends in this place and all around here."

"I know only one."

"Dr. Avangour. Oh, he'll behave himself ; but they are afeared the others will have a try to get you out. As if I was the ass to let them have the ghost of a chance. However, they've settled it among themselves. You will be sent to the chief town. Mind, if they ever learn I let you have those presents through, I should not get out of it scot free. So, for safety's sake I'll hurry that basket out of the way and eat the few oysters you left last night in your honour, my poor lad. I'll give you my word I am sorry you're going—I was getting used to you. Come along down with me to the clerk's office to get my receipt for transferring you. I'll let Dr. Avangour know that you had to go. That will save him coming here for nothing."

There was no remonstrance possible, so Calorguen hung his head and followed Roquevaire.

"And now, my lady," he murmured, "we two must fight this out together."

# CHAPTER XXXIV

## THE SISTERS' CONFLICT

ON hurrying out of Mother Calorguen's dwelling, Viviana de Bourbriac had determined to tell Dr. Avangour everything even to the find in the secret passage within the thick wall of Trigavou Castle. She meant also to relate how the master of La Hunaudaie was haunting the countryside and had been seen by her. But, on the road, she had doubted her right to defame her sister, Flavia, by revealing she had loved guiltily, and doubted, too, if it were well to tell of her meeting and dialogue with Alain.

The doctor was a devoted and incontestable friend, and Viviana could request hospitality of him; but, after all, he was none of her kin, and she ought to think twice before speaking once of family secrets to him.

Her sudden decision to go to Dinan was in order to place herself under Olivier Derquy's guard. Being her cousin german, he might be entrusted with a confidential communication, even though they did not become husband and wife. For him alone would be uttered the blackening story, so she went to the telegraph office before proceeding to the doctor's. Her despatch to Lieut. Derquy, Grand Hotel, Paris, ran :—"Come, much wanted. I am waiting at Dr. Avangour's, Duguesclin Square." She could not dream that, at that very juncture, Derquy was near her, having taken the morning train so as to arrive at Dinan that same evening at seven, where he put up at a hotel near the station.

Next day, Viviana learnt of that arrival, through the doctor having heard of it from the chief warder—a piece of news that much surprised both. Having no time to receive the message, he could not know that his cousin was at Dinan. Hence, what had he come for, and in whose company had he visited Calorguen's cell? Mdlle. de Bourbriac, eager to see him as soon as possible, besought Dr. Avangour to hunt him up. There are not so many hotels in Dinan that a new comer would not be traced. He promised to take up the quest next day, and passed away the evening in relating his interview with Pierre Calorguen.

The good doctor had returned wonder-stricken by the prisoner's firmness, touched by his resignation, and all but convinced of his guiltlessness, but far from encouraged about the issue of his trial at St. Brieuc. But he took heed not to weaken Viviana's greater than ever belief in his acquittal, and neither raised a word regarding Lady Houlbecq, Alain of Trigavou, or Pillemer. Before parting, it was agreed that the physician should seek for Lieut. Derquy during his morning visits, whilst Mdlle. de Bourbriac should betake herself to the solicitor who had received the general's last will. She was still decided on refusing to benefit by the loss to her sister, and on renouncing the heritage formally.

Lawyer Plaintel, as everybody called him, lived in Hautevoie Street, not far from Duguesclin Square, in an old house of the Old Town, and his person was in perfect harmony with the antiquated dwelling occupied by him these forty years. His father and grandfather had lived there before him, and he worthily represented this long line of solicitors and notaries. Rising with the dawn, always clad in black and a white neckcloth, he spent his life in a study crowded with papers, adjoining his chief office, where, among dusty documents, scribbled a head clerk almost as old as himself but less carefully arrayed.

This survivor of the old-fashioned solicitors in an age when servants of the law pride themselves on knowledge of lawn tennis, boat-house management, steam-launch steering, and society elegances, was an honourable man and a skilful one. For miles around folk came to consult him, and he had no equal for pointing out good investments, knowing as he did the value of all landed estates about there. He knew, too, all the families of any consequence, their genealogy, history, and monetary position. Hence there were few wealthy marriages made without his preliminary opinion on the real value of the settlements.

Lawyer Plaintel was a livingbook of information, of which, however, he made none but good use. His discretion equalled his obligingness, and the Dinan people called his study the lock-up of secrets.

M. Plaintel therefore fully deserved all the confidence given him by General Houlbecq, who had purchased Trigavou by his intermediation. Later on, when the first purchase was to be added to, this model agent had no little helped to bring about profitable bargains. So the general would come to the good old fellow's offices when he had business with him, for he never would leave it for anybody. Hence the solicitor's face was unknown at the castle, both to the baroness and Viviana, though they heard him frequently spoken of.

On the other hand, the doctor rather often met him to have his savings laid out on mortgages, and he knew the lord of La Hunaudaie ever so long, as his family had been the legal agents for the Trigavous.

Mdlle. de Bourbriac, informed by Dr. Avangour, felt no embarrassment on calling on the stranger.

She found the house designated by large scrolls in the old style, climbed very poorly-lighted stairs and, guided by a black-lettered label on a deal board, entered a long room where the mustiness offended her as soon as she took one step within.

There sat the head clerk on a worn straw-bottomed chair, at a desk, wearing spectacles and butcher's outer sleeves of linen. Two younger men were in the corners scratching their pens over paper with an exasperating squeak.

All raised their heads at once on hearing the young lady, and stared away at a client so uncommonly pretty and stylish.

She asked for M. Plaintel, and the chief clerk, without unlocking his jaws, pointed to a door across the room. The regulation was to keep quiet or whisper as in a church. Understanding, the visitor crossed the office, pushed a door, and all of a sudden faced the master, who was seated at an old cylinder writing-desk. M. Plaintel had a round, smoothly-shaven face, kindly in expression, enframed in long locks of white hair almost to his shoulders. His black eyes were still lively and his mouth smiling.

He rose politely and pointed to a worn armchair; when Viviana gave her name, he fairly beamed.

"I was expecting you," he said with a bow, "hearing that you had come to friend Avangour's. Bless you! everything gets noised in a little town like this. Excuse me not paying you a call, but my age keeps me in—my understanding is sound enough, but my understandings are shaky, d'ye see, he, he, he! However, there's no need of hurry, for there's no limit of time in acting on a will."

"It is precisely on account of my brother-in-law's will that I have come," observed Viviana.

"It is regular, quite regular, and the lamented general leaves you a magnificent fortune. The land, house, and woods are worth over a million francs; the town house eight hundred thousand at the lowest figure. I have not the exact amount at hand of the movable property, but I daresay it will top two millions. As soon as that unfortunate gamekeeper's trial comes off, you can claim the entry into possession."

"Excuse me, sir, but did not the doctor tell you——"

"He told me that he imparted to the widow the latest decision of her husband, as I begged him to do, and that her ladyship took the blow with much serenity. Many in her place would have been painfully distressed. It is true that the general settled on her a relatively important sum, and then, again, there are no children—the fortune will pass to you, mademoiselle, her dearly-beloved sister who has always lived with her. Nothing prevents her living with you when you are wedded——"

"My marriage is not before us," interrupted Mdlle. de Bourbriac, nettled by these untimely digressions. "I came to——"

"Speak about the will, I know," went on the imperturbable man of the law ; "but I must be allowed to wish well to the descendant of one of the oldest families in Brittany, for you are of Breton stock, young lady. Your great-grandsire voted with the nobles at the Rennes Parliament in 1787. He and the ancestor of the Earl of Trigavou sat there side by side. Their posterity have fared differently ; poor Lord Alain, the last of his name, has only the scraps of his paternal property."

The name made Viviana start, the more as she had not expected to hear it from Lawyer Plaintel, and it was dragged in so by neck and crop that she wondered if the solicitor did not do it on purpose.

"I know—I very well know," pursued the obstinate old fellow, "that your late father, the Marquis of Bourbriac, was as penniless as the father of Lord Alain of Trigavou ; but your house was raised again, ten years ago, by a marriage ; and no derogation either, for General Houlbecq came of a fine Norman family and an immensely rich one to boot. May the last of the Trigavous fare as well."

This was going too far, and his hearer lost patience.

"Sir," she said, "I beg you to be good enough to listen to me. I have determined to renounce the inheritance of my brother-in-law, and my visit has no other end than to ask you to prepare the form of renunciation as soon as possible."

"Give up two hundred thousand francs per annum !" ejaculated the scandalised Plaintel. "You can't think of it ! Was ever such downright folly !"

"It is my positive will !"

"But why should you give up this unexpected Godsend ?"

"Because it belongs to my sister."

"You are in error, young lady : a wife is not her husband's natural heiress, she only comes in after all the collateral relatives."

"General Houlbecq constituted her sole recipient by a previous will, revoked I know not why. I do not mean by the new one to despoil my sister."

"Very generous all this on your part; but you seem to believe that your renunciation will restore things to the *statu quo.* Not at all, young lady! Lady Houlbecq will still not inherit."

"May I know how that is?" inquired the much-astonished hearer.

"Because the general foresaw this event, knowing you thoroughly as generous—fully capable in consequence of refusing to profit by his liberality, which he had perfect freedom to show. So he took his precautions to prevent his fortune returning to his wife. He appended a codicil to his testament."

"A codicil?" repeated the other, not understanding.

"Yes, at the close of the act constituting you sole legatee, the general added this clause: 'In case Mdlle. Viviana de Bourbriac, my sister-in-law, refuses to benefit by this present will, I leave all my real and personal estate to the state, to be employed as it may decree.' You see that your disinterestedness will not advantage your sister. Whatever happens, Lady Houlbecq will never have her husband's money." Overwhelmed, Viviana let the solicitor proceed. "In this I see certain proof of a firm resolution to disinherit Lady Houlbecq. The general reasoned that his sister-in-law was capable of rejecting the fortune he left her to the detriment of his widow. If he left it, as an alternative, to poor cousins or the poor, a hospital, asylum, or any charitable foundation, she will make the more scruple of accepting it because she would be depriving the unfortunate of a blessing. So he arranged to leave it to the Government if she refused it, an impersonal receiver to profit which she is not likely to despoil herself. 'Hence she will have to inherit from me!' very sound reasoning," concluded the lawyer, "for under these conditions your refusal would almost be an insult to the general's memory. Everybody would blame you, and, moreover, you would cross your own aim, which would doubtless be to assure ample means to your sister. When you enjoy the fortune, nothing can prevent passing a portion over to Lady Houlbecq by deed of gift, or by simply handing it over, which is safer and costs nothing—ahem ! You can give her half even, and nobody can make a remark. Then Lady Houlbecq, who would have sunk from opulence into the unhappy mean, without your act, will be as well off as yourself. Nothing better. But to bring this about, you must accept the heritage, or both of you will become poor, for the splendid property will melt away to nobody's advantage in the Public Treasury. What a pity ! "

At least his auditor owned him to be a hundred times right in not playing Lady Bountiful to a pure loss.

" Are you convinced ? " inquired the orator.

" I shall see what Dr. Avangour says," answered the lady evasively, not to say like a woman. " He never mentioned this codicil."

" Because I did not mention it to him. Where was the use ? It never occurred to me that you would spurn the gift. Well, consult him ! I know his answer, knowing his rectitude, and that no sensible man can have any other opinion than mine on the matter. So Lord Alain of Trigavou said to me only yesterday."

" What ! " exclaimed Viviana, " have you been discussing this will with him ? How could that come about ? On what grounds could Lord Trigavou meddle with my business ? "

" Pray do not accuse me of telling tales," returned the old lawyer, smiling. " Everybody in the town knows by this how General Houlbecq favoured you. I kept it close, but the gentlemen on the bench did not imitate my example. Never a soul in Dinan is unaware that you are sole legatee. Hence it is quite a matter of course my clients should prate, when I see them, of the great topic. And, furthermore, do not accuse our poor Alain of meddling with what does not concern him. I am his legal agent, as I was his father's before him, and I look after his affairs in Brittany. He is lacking a purchaser for the La Hunaudaie Farm, and I hope I've found him one. My lord came to ask how the business was coming on."

"Is he going to leave these parts?"

"Yes; on account of annoyances arising from this unhappy trial. His farmer will figure as witness, having played a nasty part in the matter, it appears. Lord Alain wishes to be rid of the rogue by disposing of the land. So he came to speak of the sale, and the general's will only cropped up by mere chance in our chat. He was commiserating Lady Houlbecq, but yet was happy to know that the fortune would fall to one so worthy of it. I must add that his opinion of you is so high that he almost divined you would reject it. I showed him how impossible that was, and he agreed with me you would never commit the folly of throwing away some four millions to enrich a republican government."

"So he believes, now, that my sister is almost impoverished?"

"The truth; inasmuch as in no case, I repeat, will Lady Houlbecq finger a penny-piece."

Viviana made no comment this time, feeling the full force of the judicious lawyer's argument, and not being far from following his counsel, but she comprehended quite well why Lord Trigavou had pressed her with his suit so sharply. She had been wondering why he had suddenly declared his pretended sentiments after having so long concealed them. She had only partly believed them, but had not wholly perceived the truth. Now she saw clearly that the Prince Charming was an impudent fortune-hunter. After being her sister's choice, he would have married her if, as he expected, quadruply a millionnaire; but, on learning that her husband had disinherited her in favour of Mdlle. de Bourbriac, he had hastened to change his aim. As a practical man, he had endeavoured to obtain sure information, and hence had gone to Lawyer Plaintel before carrying the attack further, and he was completely settled on the financial situation of both sisters. The choice of the Master of La Hunaudaie was made. What mattered to him that Lady Houlbecq had besmirched her reputation for him? He threw her off without a qualm, and, having learnt from her of Viviana's inclination for him, he hoped to capture the heiress by it. He had already set about it. The meeting at the garden walk had been premeditated, and he had pleaded so well that the lady had heard him out. He flattered himself he had produced a deep impression, and he was not far out on that point. Besides, he had more than one string to his bow, and the services he purposed rendering Calorguen were of a nature to win Viviana's gratitude. Therefore he might reasonably reckon on complete success, and no doubt he duly waited for a fresh chance to finish a campaign so well commenced—a chance that he would plot to bring about.

He was not to know his prize had learnt the truth on the sincerity of his declaration since she had penetrated the tower interior. He horrified her, and all she thought of was to avoid him, after having told him bluntly how she scorned him, without giving the reason.

"Talking of my dear client," resumed the solicitor, blundering as to the meaning of his caller's silence, "I feel very friendly in regard to him, and should be most happy to see him rise by a wealthy alliance out of a position painful to a nobleman boasting one of the finest names in the peerage of Old Brittany. Lord Alain of Trigavou is almost a poor man, though he cannot be reproached for squandering his fortune, since it was his father reduced it so low. He has managed with what was left him very wisely, and he lives as sensibly as can be. As for his personal gifts, young lady—you know all about that—and you must own that he is a finished gentleman."

This eulogy of the last of the Trigavous so much resembled the overture to a matrimonial request that Viviana sprang up from the fear of yielding to the temptation to tell the trumpeter what she really thought of his lord and master.

"Good day, sir," she said. "I thank you for your information, and I shall reflect on your advice."

"Going already!" cried the lawyer. "Can I have offended you unintentionally?"

"Not at all; but I am in no wise interested about the Count of Trigavou, with whom I have little acquaintance. Allow me to take my leave."

Without letting herself be delayed by Plaintel's excuses and entreaties, the visitor nodded and went forth. He saw her to the stair-head and returned downcast, unable to perceive in what point his remarks had displeased the sole legatee of General Houlbecq.

Viviana was in haste to speak to the doctor of the codicil, and to learn if he had discovered Derquy in one hotel or another. She was more than heretofore bound to ask aid and help of the loyal friend whom Lord Trigavou had sought to slander. Whether he had or had not fought a duel on behalf of some notorious woman, he would not refuse to counsel and protect his cousin in her thorny situation. And, since Viviana knew the value of her elder sister and Alain, she gauged Olivier justly; he had loved her three years, and not for her money, since he had urged her to repudiate the general's bequest. She forgave him all the wrongs that Trigavou cast up to him; and if she did not yet love him as he deserved, at least she was willing to wed him, if he still desired it.

She did not doubt that the doctor had found him, and she even marvelled that she had not run up against him, for Dinan is not a vast city, and she had gone through the most crowded part on her way to and from the solicitor's. On this return she had to cross Duguesclin Square once more, the principal promenade.

What days the garrison cavalry band gives a concert here the citizens and tourists gather, for amusements are scarce; but these *belle-assemblées*, as our fathers called them, only take place in the summer, and in winter the place is deserted, except on Thursdays, the market days.

It is a parallelogram, edged with old trees and surrounded at a distance by respectable dwellings. At one end of the woody walk rises the statue of Bertrand Duguesclin, on the very spot where, in 1350, he fought the English knight, Sir Thomas of Canterbury.

To reach Avangour's residence our heroine had to pass by this pedestal, in the midst of five paths meeting, where the town board had placed benches. In her haste, Viviana would not have paid any attention to a woman fashionably dressed in black and carefully veiled, who occupied one of these forms; but the latter leaped up on seeing her, and coming to her straight said, as she raised her veil:

"What brings you here?"

"Flavia!" ejaculated Mdlle. de Bourbriac, greatly affected.

"Why are you not over at Trigavou?" demanded Lady Houlbecq.

"I was there, and I am going back. But as for yourself?"

"I came in from Paris this morning. Where are you staying here?"

"At Dr. Avangour's; there, in Dame Calorguen's cottage."

"I am not going to stop anywhere, as I shall take the evening train after keeping an appointment."

"With whom?"

"There's no need of your knowing it. But I should like to know how you have spent the time since quitting me."

"In collecting evidence of the innocence of the man accused of slaying your husband."

"You mean to say you have been scouring the country. Does that imply you came in contact with Lord Trigavou?"

Viviana did not feel her former sentiments towards her elder. Now the latter inspired an insurmountable repulsion. She hoped never to see her more, for she had at length comprehended what happened on St. Hubert's Night in the castle, and how murder had followed another crime. She could not forget how Flavia, in their town house, had found cruel pleasure in forcing her to acknowledge her love for Alain of Trigavou; she guessed now that Alain was to meet her in Dinan; but she had not foreseen that the sinner would show such impudence as to talk of the villain. This was going so far beyond decency that the younger lady determined to put an end to it.

"Yes," she replied, coldly; "I have met Lord Trigavou—and he managed it."

"Then he spoke with you? What did he say?" challenged Flavia, white-hot with rage.

"He strove to make me believe he loved me."

"You lie!"

"I have never done so in my whole life, and I scorn deceivers above all. Lord Trigavou did not pause there, but went on to say that he came to Brittany merely to save Calorguen in help of me."

"What was your answer?"

"That I required no aid to defend an innocent man. I feigned not to understand the rest."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No; were I to do so, and were he to dare address me, I should forbid his repeating the insult."

"Dear me, have you quite got over the passion you entertained for his lordship?" inquired Lady Houlbecq, ironically.

"Lord Trigavou is a villain. He sought to wed me because he knew my brother-in-law left me a fortune. He made sure of the fact by questioning M. Plaintel, who holds the will."

"Your intention was to annul that gift. Changed your mind, it seems?"

"Whether I accept or not, you will not receive it. Your husband added a clause which excluded you, a clause which Lord Trigavou knows. Are you still amazed that he should betray you?"

"Betray! What do you mean?"

"I know everything. Do not oblige me to speak more plainly."

"But I do require your fully explaining."

"Require? Do you force me to remind you that on the day of misfortune, a few hours before your husband was slain, you begged me to help you save a man—a man you secreted in the tower? Am I to name him, and tell how he left the tower?"

"I want you to tell me how you learnt all this."

"What matters? I do know, and the proof is—a certain one, irrefutable! but, never fear, I am not going to use it to destroy you. I promise you I would have forgiven you, deeply guilty though you be, for all your sinfulness at the castle, but in Paris you tried to cheat me—you ventured to advise me to marry Lord Trigavou. That I can never pardon."

"'Twas only to test you. I was jealous and burning to know if he was fond of you. You have just asserted that he is so now. Let me be but sure of his treachery and that day costs him dear. I suspected it already. On leaving town to go to Dinan to arrange about Calorguen's acquittal, he vowed not to go to Trigavou and to write me every day. But I received no word after his departure, and so, unable to endure it, I left last evening. I know his dwelling-place here, and I went there on leaving the train: he was not at home—not in at seven in the morning! I left a note making an appointment here, and so I am here awaiting him."

"In that case I shall leave you. I have no wish to see him."

"On the contrary, remain. I would like to question him before you, and confound him, for, if you have spoken the truth, he would not dare deny it in your presence."

"I—stand by at a colloquy of you two! never! it is too much to know he is your guilty partner," said the young lady, bitterly. "You do not understand all my suffering at having to utter such a word to my sister—I, Viviana de Bourbriac! Have you, then, forgotten when we lived at our father's? I was but a child then, and you a young lady, but we loved one another dearly, and shared joy and sorrow.

Then you held nothing back from me, and, even after you married, we had no secrets; at least I thought so, and I never dreamt of parting from you. Dreadful has been my awakening. If you only knew what I felt when you told me, 'I have a man concealed in my rooms!' a stab to my very heart. Had I foreseen what would ensue, I believe I should have died of grief."

Her voice failed her, she was so choked by sobs. Emotion is catching, and Flavia had tears well up into her eyes.

"You weep!" exclaimed Viviana, "I may hope that you repent. It is never too late to redeem faults, and yours you may redeem."

"How so?" faltered the guilty one.

"By spurning the scoundrel who was your ruin. You will tell me you have not enough courage—well, go leave France, as was your intention."

"Any one can see you have never been in love! you fancy that by sheer will a burning passion can be plucked from the heart. Can't you understand that I am enchained to this man and must go on loving him though I despise him?"

"Your remedy is flight. And if some remnant of affection for me still dwells in you, flee, I beseech you! flee without a glimpse of him and not a line on your whereabouts. Heaven will guide you. Your suffering will be your expiation until, in the end, you forget."

"Will you come with me?" inquired Lady Houlbecq abruptly.

"I would if I could, but it is impossible. I have promised to defend that unjustly accused man to the uttermost, and Olivier would reproach me for abandoning the cause he has espoused."

"Olivier, do you mean to marry him?"

"Yes, if he will have me?"

"Do you doubt that?"

"I may well do so. He fought a duel in Paris for the sake of a notorious woman."

"That's not true! he fought with some fellow who spoke slanderously of me. Who told you a notorious woman was the cause?"

"Spare me the pain of naming the calumniator to you."

"Ha! 'tis Alain, the scoundrel! he told the lie to embroil you with your betrothed! I believe you now; he is after your money; and to clear the field he accuses Olivier of perfidy. All he looks for is to get him out of the way—if he could send him to the dock like Calorguen, he would not falter."

"At last, you see the devil in his true blackness. Courage, Flavia! hearken to your sister urging you to flee; she will receive you back with open arms. Leave the wretch under the belief that I am keeping your husband's fortune. He does not know that I only accept it in order to restore it to you—not now, not yet lest he return to you and you are ensnared again by one of the deceptions he practises so featly. But it is yours, and I shall keep it for you, certain that Olivier will approve my action."

"Ay, he loves you for yourself alone," sighed Lady Houlbecq, bitterly. "But how does the fortune matter to me, now my life is over?"

"No, no, since I am still beside you. I pledge myself that we shall meet again, to part no more unless you cause the parting. But haste away! I have unsealed your eyes. Profit for flight by the moment when the man's unworthiness is apparent. You said you awaited him here, but, fortunately, he has not come, so do not waste another instant but return to Paris. There is an express in an hour. Let me accompany you to the station."

There was no answer and Flavia was gazing elsewhere.

"Alas!" sighed the younger lady, "I see I have not converted you: you hope to meet him."

"Even though what you assert were true," cried the baroness. "But I want to be sure he has deceived me. You say one thing, he may say another. Why should I condemn him unheard? If it is distasteful for you to see him, get you hence—I can question him without you by."

Love is incurable in these tropical beings. Flavia could listen to reason intermittently, but her consuming flame blazed up more furiously afterwards and her good resolutions vanished in smoke. She had heard Viviana out with impatience, and now the blood flew to her brain where anger and jealousy seethed ; this jealousy turned her as much against her sister as her lover.

"I thirst to know which of you speaks the truth," she resumed. "There is no proof it is you. Your trying to drive me far away implies that you wish to retain him. You did love him, and may love him still. You feign to resign yourself to marrying Olivier, but he is not the mate you dreamt of. Marry your Olivier as the only means of showing me that you have no underhand reason to drive me out of France; do it at once and let me act in my own way with Alain. I want neither your advice nor your pity."

Mdlle. de Bourbriac's heart fired up at this. She raised her head indignantly, looked the speaker in the face, and thus answered her :—

"This is too much. You dare to accuse me of loving this villain. Only let him come and show me how far his audacity can go, and I shall tell him what I think of him. But bear in mind that henceforward you will be a stranger to me. I no longer have a sister."

"As you please. Mark that you proposed it. But begone! and let me never see you more."

"Farewell," said Viviana, painfully. "I grieve for you and shall pray for you."

To reach the doctor's house she had only to cross the square. She turned her back on her sister, who watched her with a tearless eye, though it might be a departure for ever, and she quickened her pace in fear to relent, so little would have turned her back to try anew to tear the unfortunate woman from the odious Alain's entanglement. She was about to raise the knocker over Dr. Avangour's door-plate, when, lifting her eyes, she beheld Alain of Trigavou a few steps from her. He came along, skirting the houses closely like a skulking wolf approaching the fold. He had spied Viviana from afar, and he had his hat off already, and a smile on his lips.

"You here!" he began. "When we parted at Trigavou, I little expected to see you again so soon."

Mdlle. de Bourbriac coloured up, but she did not attempt to evade him. He did not frighten her now, and she resolved to end the affair.

"What do you desire, my lord?" she demanded in a ringing voice.

"I bring you news of Calorguen; and I——"

"You forget you are awaited yonder," she interrupted, pointing to the trees around the statue.

"I? Who should be expecting me?"

"The person who left a note at your lodgings this morning."

"I have not received it. I went out quite early, and have not been back. But—I—I know nobody here."

"Ask her whence she comes," said Viviana, still looking away in the direction in which the other glanced, whereupon he saw Lady Houlbecq step forth from under the trees towards the doctor's residence. He turned pale. He was caught between two fires, and the decisive game was to be played.

# CHAPTER XXXV

## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

TRIGAVOU never lost his self-command. A less cool hand would have hurried away; but he had played Lovelace too long to elude a perilous explanation. He may even have delighted in facing the emergency. Great generals are more proud of winning a battle against odds than when they have all the heavy battalions that ensure victory.

"What!" said he, without emotion, "did you allude to your sister? I could not divine that, but I am only too happy to see her. Shall we go and save her half the distance, eh? I see some people on the street; we can chat more at ease in the square."

Without staying for a reply, he crossed the street, followed by Viviana, decided to brave all in assistance of her sister in this dangerous interview, and to sustain her if she weakened, and to give Lord Trigavou the lie if he durst deny his treachery. Flavia had lifted her veil, and she advanced with glittering eyes and a lofty head. The Master of La Hunaudaie accosted her ceremoniously, as he would do if they had met in a public place in the capital.

"I never expected the honour of meeting your ladyship in Dinan," he began in his society voice, the unemphatic, inflexible voice, in a grave key.

"You might have foreseen that I should rejoin you," returned Lady Houlbecq in quite another tone. "You did not write me after your leaving, and I know why."

This reply, in a familiar way, equalled a declaration of war, and Trigavou, feeling that something new had happened, prepared to be guarded. He felt the eyes of the younger lady upon him too, standing near as she did, pale and still.

"I am astonished, madame, that you did not divine the reason for my silence," he said. "You and your sister are interested in the unfortunate keeper put in prison. I learn that my tenant, Pillemer, accused him, and I waited to question him before writing you. Now I have done so, and have the certainty that he much exaggerated matters, and will moderate his deposition."

"You lie! You came here to meet my sister, and you have contrived to do so."

"I did meet her—quite by chance—for I hope you do not imagine that I pre-arranged it with Mdlle. de Bourbriac."

"No," interjected Viviana, coldly, "my sister does not insult me by believing I arranged to meet you in this part of the country, where I found you in my path."

"Insult!" repeated the nobleman, with a forced smile. "That's a hard expression. I see that I am unlucky enough to displease you, and I should be much obliged by learning in what way?"

"I am going to let you know," returned Viviana, bent on disentangling herself from the dilemma.

She guessed that the nobleman sought to escape under evasive replies, and she feared that Flavia would accept them.

"You led me to believe that you loved me," continued the younger lady, "and you would have plainly declared yourself, had I allowed it. Do you deny this?"

"I should be an ill-bred fellow to defend myself as for a crime, for letting you perceive the sentiment you inspired," rejoined Lord Trigavou gaily.

"Enough subterfuges, my lord. Have the courage to acknowledge that you proposed to me because I am rich, my brother-in-law having left me his fortune. You knew this on coming to Trigavou, but to make sure there was no mistake, you went this morning for verification to M. Plaintel, who has General Houlbecq's will. You are assured now, and you need hesitate no more. It depends on me alone whether I am or not the Countess of Trigavou."

This outspoken language in the gentle, timid Viviana's mouth disconcerted the Master of La Hunaudie. Little expecting such plain speech and confiding in her love, he had relied on her wavering before Lady Houlbecq. He had never foreseen the two sisters would confront him together.

"Confess whilst about it, too," proceeded Viviana, "that you have defamed Lieut. Olivier Derquy, my cousin and betrothed. To prevent him marrying me you told me he had been duelling on account of some woman of bad repute. You knew very well that his duel was on behalf of my sister libelled in his presence."

"Young lady," returned the noble, not yet unsaddled, "if you will be good enough to reflect, you will own that I am less to blame than appears. You asked me what kept Olivier in town. My answer was that he had been hurt in a duel—the truth—and I believed I was excusing your cousin in so saying. Then you wanted to know what brought him on the field of honour. Had I told you he silenced an insolent fellow maligning your sister, I should not have acted properly. I gave you the first explanation that came into my head, without thinking whether it was well chosen or not, and I believed afterwards that Olivier would readily justify himself. My call on M. Plaintel is explained by his being my local legal agent. He is a talkative fool, as you must have perceived, and if he mentioned me to you, it is not because I questioned him on your concerns, pray believe me."

Lady Houlbecq listened, frowning, to this defence rather bold than plausible, but Viviana could read on her face that she was prone to credit it, and so she determined to push her interrogation to the end.

"My lord," she said, eyeing Lord Trigavou steadily, "I beg you to answer me plainly if I consent to be your wife, will you marry me—yes or no?"

This blunt question did disconcert the nobleman. There was no evading the point. He began to understand that the bold persistence was the outcome of a conference between the sisters. Where would Viviana have found the power to speak in this strain if Lady Houlbecq had not given her the inspiration? But what had incited the elder so far against him? Had she revealed her jealousy and irritated Viviana into unmasking the double-faced cavalier? Remote as his conjectures reached, he fell below the truth. He would have asked nothing better than to reply with a burning declaration; but Flavia had her large black eyes fixed on him, and he knew what she was capable of in the way of avenging treachery. So he sought to escape by a jest.

"The world is upside-down, it meseems," he said, laughing. "Really, young lady, you are popping the question to me, ha! ha! Fortunately there's nobody to overhear you."

"I am here," intervened Lady Houlbecq, suddenly, "and I ask your reply. You can speak freely. My sister knows how intimate are our relations."

At this impudent speech, Mdlle. de Bourbriac turned pale with shame though she herself had brought it about. Flavia, in parading her sin, uttered no news, yet the sudden phrase was revolting. Alain blanched too, but with rage. Down came all the castles that he had reared in the air since the general's death. He saw the state of things at last, and that his matrimonial projects were annulled. Mdlle. de Bourbriac could not be prevailed on to accept him now, and there remained no prospect of recouping on the other side, for he could not fancy that Viviana would give up the money to enrich Lady Houlbecq. There remained a woman of whom he was weary, and whom he detested already since she had run counter to his schemes and baulked them. But, in the first place, he must try to march out with the honours of war from the tight corner.

"Mademoiselle," he said in the stinging tone he used to wound a woman, "the spontaneous avowal you hear absolves me from teaching you that you have taken seriously mere polite commonplaces. I do not know about your inclination for me, but I do know that I have never sought to please you. Your sister would not have forgiven me, or Olivier either. Marry him, and I hope you will both be happy. As for the gamekeeper you are so much interested about, I shall continue not to be hostile to him. In return, I hope you will keep to yourself solely the confidence Flavia has made you."

This way of speaking of the general's relict was an insult, and Viviana felt it so. Trigavou might just as well have said: "I need no longer be particular. This creature is in my power and you are her sister." The woman thus treated coarsely was rather pleased at it; it seemed to set the seal on the claim she believed she enjoyed over him. She thought to herself: He means to marry me." At that very moment Alain was considering how he should shake himself free of her altogether!

Mdlle. de Bourbriac saw that this was no place for her. She had expected her sister to take her hand and there she was on her gallant's arm. It was the last straw. She turned away with a bruised heart, whilst they also departed without turning their heads. Indeed, now she had no sister. She had tried to save, but she could not save one who rushed back to the abyss whence Viviana had snatched her.

The doctor's house was a shelter against such encounters. She ran there, and the servant who opened the door told her she had just admitted her master and a gentleman in his company.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed she, "he has brought home Olivier. I only hope they did not see me in the square with Flavia and that man."

It was not without reason she was thus alarmed, for she could not tell of her sister's disgrace, and any other reply was not forthcoming if they questioned her. She was wrongly in fear. The doctor and the naval officer had come up the side of the square animatedly conversing, and had paid no attention to the trio in the square.

They were all happy to meet in the parlour—just the reception-room you look for in a country physician's house: a well-waxed oaken floor, velvet-seated armchairs, a clock of the First Empire pattern under a glass shade, and the inevitable engraving of Hippocrates rejecting Artaxerxes' gifts. This almost imperative plate does not suppress the contribution-plate, of course ; and the doctor would not have attained a tolerable income without taking fees, but he was nevertheless a disinterested man who served the poor gratuitously.

"I had quite trouble enough in hunting up your cousin," said he merrily. "Just imagine that he put up at a third-rate inn, where I should never have sought for him. However, I did find him, and I brought him along."

Olivier appeared somewhat embarrassed, not yet venturing to look the lady in the face.

"What do you think I have found out besides ?" went on Dr. Avangour. "This fine fellow has given way to his warlike fury and caught a sword-thrust. Just show your wrist out of that ulster sleeve—a healed wound, but the last dressing is still on it."

"Don't blush, coz," said Mdlle. de Bourbriac. "I know now why and for whom you fought."

"In that case you know more than I do," remarked the medical gentleman. "But never mind this old story of the duel, whilst I acquaint you with fresher matter of interest."

Viviana dreaded that Lady Houlbecq was going to be discussed—of all subjects the most painful to her, especially in the presence of her intended. But she was speedily relieved.

"To begin with," pursued the medico, "Calorguen has been transferred to St. Brieuc by superior order ; gone in a special carriage this morning. I saw two gendarmes march him into the station, and two warders receive him sent over purposely. He walked lame, and—"

"Did you speak to him ?"

"I couldn't, the warders not allowing me to get near. I went over to the hotel opposite the station, and there found M. Derquy. I acquainted him with what I had seen, and he told me what he had better repeat himself, for it is rather a mixed-up story."

"By my fay, cousin," said Derquy, "I confess that I hardly know where to begin. I want to unload what's on my heart about not sending you word of me after you left town; and here's the good doctor steering me into telling you of recent facts, perhaps of a string with the measures taken against poor Calorguen."

"Commence by clearing yourself of having forgotten me," rejoined the lady, smiling. "I authorise and entreat you."

"I ask nothing better. Know, then, coz—stay, you know already—since our solitary interview at your sister's house, I came to words with somebody, and had to go out, and got wounded. Well, I charged Lord Trigavou to tell you and your sister that I had sprained my ankle, which would keep me indoors a few days. I did not care you should know I had been duelling. I daresay Alain blundered in the tale."

"Worse than you imagine."

"That's no odds, so long as you are not vexed at my going out. Whilst I was in my room, Alain told me that you were going to lodge at the gamekeeper's mother's; as he was off that way as well, he offered to meet me at Dinan, where we might be useful to Calorguen. I let him persuade me, though I would have preferred joining you at Trigavou. I was a little ashamed at having fought and being beaten like some pert middy. A man engaged to be married ought to have no other engagement without his betrothed giving him leave."

"I should have granted it on demand. But I am eager to know what you have been doing here. Not even a call on Dr. Avangour! Had you looked in you would have found me, or at least have gained news of me. And you cooped yourself up in a pothouse!"

"We're coming to the point. I wanted to bear you good tidings. Trigavou had the intention to help Calorguen break jail. I offered objections, but came round and joined in with him. I was convinced that it would come off last night. The Count had everything ready, a rope to slide down the wall, a boat at St. Lunaire to cross the Channel. Judge of my astonishment and disappointment when our friend Avangour announced that Calorguen had just gone to St. Brieuc under guard. The attempt has failed, that's clear. I told the doctor about it, and he concludes I am in a scrape. The head turnkey is an old sailor, who knows me, and that a basket of oysters was sent in to Calorguen in my name; in it were hidden the rope and other implements by Trigavou, of which the prisoner could not have made use, and the warder will find them if the basket be examined."

"Oh, cousin, cousin, what have you done?" cried the young lady. "What possessed you to follow that man's advice?"

"Whom do you call 'that man'? I was talking of Alain."

"I will inform you later on what I think of him. But how is it you did not see that Calorguen would only injure himself by escaping? Flight is equivalent to confessing guilt. What he ought to wish, and what I do wish, is his acquittal. But Lord Trigavou has other aims than ours."

"My dear Viviana, you appear prejudiced against him. Allow me still to stand up for him."

"You can defend him hereafter, my dear Derquy," interposed the doctor. "Meanwhile, be pleased to come with me. I am going to the castle to see Roquevaire on the pretext of asking why his prisoner was taken from him. He will tell me if he found prohibited articles in the basket. If so, I shall urge him to keep them close for his own sake. I shall assure him anyhow that you had nothing to do with them, and lay it all to Lord Trigavou, whom he does not know, and whose name I shall not give him. He must believe that the gentleman who visited the keep at the same time as you, was some chance-met tourist. At any rate, there's no use in Roquevaire seeing you," concluded the doctor. "You can go to wait for me on the outer walk whilst I see him at the guard-room."

"I shall accompany my cousin," said Viviana determinedly.

"Very good; but let us lose no time."

This arrangement suited the lady, intending to remain under the sea-officer's wing, and most anxious to entrust to him what she did not dare to state in the doctor's hearing.

So the three went out together, though they parted almost at once. Avangour proceeded straight to the castle, and the young couple took the opposite road in order to reach Duclos Place, where the Lesser Moat Boulevard commences. There they were to meet their friend. They walked on side by side for a time without speaking, one as much embarrassed as the other, or Olivier rather more than Viviana, but he broke the ice.

"Coz," he said, "I will never more keep anything back from you. Pray have no secrets from me. What has our poor Alain done?"

"Do you believe me capable of speaking against my real feelings or judging a man lightly?" inquired she.

"Certainly not."

"Then—whilst unable to tell on what I base my appreciation—I must affirm that Lord Trigavou is a wicked man, capable, I believe, of the basest deeds, and impudently making a fool of you, me——"

She stopped as she was about to add "and my sister."

"Is this possible?" stammered the stupefied lieutenant.

"I tell you the truth. I shall cite one act of his; speaking of your duel, he tried to make me believe it was about a notorious woman of Paris."

"Then he's a rascal! that makes me remember he tried to—to——"

"Go on. Nothing that man can do will surprise me."

"He pretended you were too fond of Calorguen."

"I am astonished he said nothing harder. Now, my dear Olivier, I have one favour to ask you—the first, but it will not be the last, I daresay, for a woman is always pestering her husband——"

"You have settled I shall be yours, eh?"

"Whenever you like, my dear. As soon as Calorguen's fate is decided we shall fix the wedding-day. But promise me to cease relations with Lord Trigavou forthwith."

"I promise. Yet it will come hard to drop him so sharply."

"I do not believe he will try to keep friends with you. If he does, I rely on your repulsing him."

"I will. If he demands a reason, I shall give him none, for the very good one that——"

"You are ignorant what I reproach him with. I shall tell you when we are man and wife. Let's speak no more of him. But Heaven forbid that he has inveigled you! The rope sent to Calorguen, you say, went in your name? His taking such care to keep this back persuades me that he had an evil design under all. He does nothing without a motive, and he had none in helping the prisoner to get free."

Olivier made no remark, deep in regrets as he was that he had so trusted a man whom his beloved condemned without appeal.

The pair had walked as far as the donjon.

"Is it there he was imprisoned?" queried Viviana.

"Yes—almost directly under that flat roof. The grated window you see overhead is his cell's. Look, the bars are untouched. He made no effort to break out. Hang it all! the tools and rope would remain in the bottom of the basket and Roquevaire will find them."

"Not so," said Viviana, laying her hand on the speaker's arm, "for look in the depths of that ditch among the nettles—see that gleam!"

"Ay, and the hempen snake among the brushwood—a rope—a seaman is not to be taken in on that. Calorguen flung it out of the cell window."

"I am not surprised at his refusing to go. But that cord must not be seen. Go, get it, I beg you, while nobody is about."

Derquy scrambled down to the spot, and she saw him stoop and successively pick up a chisel and pincers which he stuffed in his overcoat pocket, and a rope, which he dragged behind him up on the macadam of the walk.

"I've them all," he said, "as Trigavou promised, except a file which might take too much trouble to find. But, say, dear Vivie, where am I to stow away this rope?"

"Roll it round you like a sash under your coat."

"Dash it all, I—I shan't be able to make it meet with all that coil—it's such a long rope, eh? not so long as I believed. Hillo, coz," he continued to Viviana who was aiding him, "it scarcely goes a dozen times round me, and I am no elephant. How queer! by the eye, I would have taken that wall to run twenty odd yards up to that cell."

"It is some thirty."

"Then I can't make it out. Trigavou told me he had measured the height. How could he have been so far out in his reckoning?"

"He made no mistake."

"Then we have."

"No, Olivier, understand the man better whom you called friend. He sent a rope too short purposely, believing that Calorguen would let go on coming to the end and be killed by the fall."

"Oh! that would be worse than murder, and, after all, Trigavou is a nobleman. Besides, what interest has he in destroying a humble gamekeeper who never did him harm?"

"If I told you, you would not believe me; but hereafter you shall learn. But here comes Dr. Avangour—button up your coat and say not a word, I entreat you. The doctor would put the same questions as you, and I do not wish to answer."

Derquy obeyed as best he could. Luckily his topcoat was so easy that the new-comer, who had no reason to scan him closely, did not notice he had doubled in bulk.

"Be of good cheer," he said on arriving. "I found Roquevaire swallowing the last dozen of oysters, and the empty basket by his side. Evidently my Lord Trigavou had put nothing in, and I was worried vainly."

"So much the better!" cried Vivette, looking at her lover to impose silence. "What did he say about Calorguen?"

"That the Public Prosecutor's order was brought over by a gendarme officer. The 'sizes open next Monday, exceptionally. This sufficiently explains the removal as Calorguen had not appealed. But he appeared ill, and I myself remarked he walked lame. Roquevaire thought that they were afraid to leave him here among so many friends, but he suspects nothing."

"Then I can go and live over at St. Brieuc without fear?" asked Derquy.

"And go into court too," added the doctor. "We shall all meet there, for I am summoned as a witness. Mdlle. de Bourbriac also, and Lady Houlbecq——"

"She will not appear," observed Viviana.

"That would be wrong. Lord Trigavou is down on the jury list; but, in his place, I should get Calorguen's lawyer to challenge me. I daresay he will go into the box, though, if called."

"He may be sorry if he does," muttered the lady. "Well, I shall go over to-morrow with my cousin. By the way, he will be my husband in a month."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the good doctor. "All's well that ends well."

# CHAPTER XXXVI

## THE SPECIAL TRIAL

THE great day dawned. It was such for a third-rate place like St. Brieuc, where distractions are few. The opening of assizes in the country is always an event. But this was no common session when vulgar malefactors were judged, but a celebrated case. Nothing was lacking, neither the interest attached to a victim of the upper classes, the mystery enveloping the cause of the crime, the sympathy inspired by the accused, nor even the romantic colouring of a judicial tragedy.

The whole county took up arms for or against Calorguen, and the Parisian dailies sent down special correspondents. The chief judge was unable to satisfy the clamour of the notables for reserved seats. The Hall of Justice was, however, a fine large one, in so lovely a garden, that the spectator imagines none but laughable breach of promise cases should be heard there. Quite otherwise, for this part of Brittany is fertile in black crimes.

The hotels swarmed with unusual guests. Viviana de Bourbriac, Derquy, and Dr. Avangour engaged rooms in the one most frequented by the old county families. The two former had been over here since a few days, but the doctor, having his patients to attend to, did not arrive till the eve of the trial. None of them had seen Count Trigavou, or heard news of Lady Houlbecq.

Her sister believed she would not put in an appearance, and as one believes what one wishes, she deluded herself that the guilty woman had fled abroad after her advice.

Derquy, edified on Alain's real character, had no longing to see him, but was determined, if they did meet, to tell him his opinion of him.

The doctor, less interested, and more philosophical than the loving couple, merely wished the prisoner a happy deliverance, without being too hopeful, and wondered whether the general's widow had better testify or not for Calorguen's welfare, for he knew that there was some secret between her and the keeper; he suspected, moreover, that she knew who was her husband's murderer, and did not denounce him for potent reasons.

Viviana and the doctor had to go into the witnesses' waiting-room. Derquy had a reserved seat behind the bench, the presiding judge being a friend of his father's, and not requiring twice asking for the favour.

All three reached the law courts half an hour before the opening, to find the entrances besieged by mixed throngs, peasants and townsfolk, tradesmen and middle-class ladies. Among them the doctor and Viviana recognised some Trigavou farmers and labourers. At the witnesses' doorway they met Commander Jugon, called back from Paris, the general's servants, and the commander, the plumbers who had fastened the metal plate over the condemned door, and, lastly, Pillemer, the tenant of La Hunaudaie, whom everybody shunned. At this point Lieut. Derquy quitted his friends to enter the court by the privileged seat-holders' door. There was a mob there, and he was a late comer, but the senior judge had particularly recommended him, and he was led to a place where only important personages were admitted.

The hall filled up rapidly, so that ere long there was not only no empty place, but there were more in than the oblong space, half of it devoted to the public, ought to have held. Suffocation impended over the compressed throng, and ladies fanned and sniffed at smelling-bottles.

In the middle of the gap before the judges, according to usage, a large table displayed the pieces of evidence—

Calorguen's fowling-gun, the scarcely flattened bullet which had slain Baron Houlbecq, and his waistcoat perforated by the same.

Our sea officer, never in a court before, deemed this exhibition useless and disgusting, and, turning his eyes aloof, he reviewed his neighbours, who noticed he was not one of their circle, and wondered what gave him the right to be there. There was not one acquaintance of his in the whole hall. He began to doubt the propriety of his coming, where his presence would probably confuse his cousins when they gave evidence; but it was too late to leave, and all he could do was promise himself to keep close. As for Lord Trigavou, if he were called on the jury, he would be challenged, of course; they would never allow him to act in a case where his farmer was the principal accusing witness.

Suddenly an usher's voice rang out: "Hats off, gentlemen! The court!"

The first judge to appear was the presiding one, in scarlet robe, followed closely by two juniors in black gowns, with a blue sash, following the tradition of the Rennes High Court. Then came the Proctor of the Republic, in black, like the junior judges, to take his place on the right of the bench. All this was managed solemnly, as was proper, but with some pompous bustle. When silence fell again, the chief judge ordered the bringing in of the accused, whereupon all eyes were riveted on a small door which almost instantly opened.

Calorguen came forth, accompanied by two gendarmes, between whom he was allowed to sit down, with his advocate directly below him.

A favourable murmur ran through the audience at the appearance of the strapping fellow of military bearing and sympathetic face. He looked very well indeed in his gamekeeper's uniform, the only clothes he had, and instantly pleased the gentler sex, who composed one-third the assemblage.

Derquy remembered having seen him at the castle, and judged that he had not a murderer's mien. It was simple and becoming. Some prisoners are downcast and enfeebled others try to brazen it out. Calorguen bore himself finely between weakness and audacity, and calmly scanned the court and spectators. Derquy fancied he was looking for somebody, and even fixed his attention on one group on the foremost seats, but he could not distinguish the object.

The drawing for the jury now began. In this case the challenges fell so thick, especially from the defence, that its dozen good men and true were quickly ruled out.

The accepted jurymen went up into their box, the first selected becoming the foreman.

Calorguen looked impassibly and indifferently on this gradual formation of the fateful group near him. He had given his defender full scope about the challenges, so little troubling himself as not even to glance at the list of the thirty-six sent the prisoner a few days before the trial. His advocate, slightly informed about the local personages, had been rather too hasty in his killing-off work, so that there were still four names to leave the urn to complete the jury when his shots were spent.

"The Count of Trigavou," said the president.

That name made Lieut. Derquy start in his place among the audience. He had forgotten, for the time being, that his once friend would be called, and had not remarked him in the party.

"I hope he will be struck off," thought Olivier, but not a remonstrance was raised and Count Alain of Trigavou went into the box.

A tempest was unloosed in Calorguen's brain at this first announcement to him that his hated rival was still alive, and his calm face changed altogether.

"He fears him greatly," reasoned Lieut. Derquy. "I am astonished, too, that Pillemer's master should be harboured in the jury-box."

It never occurred to him that Calorguen was unaware Trigavou was living. Since the general's death, he had not heard the nobleman mentioned, even by Dr. Avangour in his calls. Having vowed to avenge himself on Lady Houlbecq for sending him the short rope, Calorguen had softened in his purpose to show her up in the court-room. Not that he pardoned her, but he reasoned that Heaven had adequately chastened her by striking down her paramour whom she would nevermore see to adore and whom he evermore would execrate. Hence, where was the good in destroying her by the public declaration that she had ordered him to kill her husband? Pity and unending affection urged him to hold his peace when, all of a sudden, his rival arose again. This noble of her preference might wed her and the pair enjoy the fruits of their crime in peacefulness.

"Am I to endure this?" mused Calorguen. "No! I shall expose them mercilessly, at the moment she appears. Face to face I will remind her of her written order to kill the general, which order I can place before the judges' eyes. Cited as witness, she must come forward. In pity for her, I have not had Yvon called, who keeps the paper, but I can have an adjournment till the morrow and give him time to arrive."

Meanwhile the session was proclaimed open, and the clerk set to reading the indictment.

In sum, it said: an atrocious crime had been committed, which we impute to the prisoner in the dock. The evidence should enlighten the obscure points in the case, and the rest is left to the jury. Generally a verdict of not guilty is delivered, unless something unexpected comes up in the course of debate, to modify the prisoner's position. This is what the lovers of accusation look for.

Derquy had listened to the cautious document attentively and drew a good augury from it.

"Calorguen's defender must be a blunderer if he cannot demolish so flimsy an argument," he thought. "But why does the accused look so prostrated? A while ago he was quietly gazing about him, but now he is staring at Lord Trigavou. I can understand his not liking him among the jury, but what's the use of trying to stare him out of countenance? he had better get ready to answer the leading judge, who seems anything but friendly."

"Rise, prisoner in the dock!"

This order from the bench startled Calorguen out of his absorbing thoughts. He obeyed and answered in a firm voice to the obligatory questions.

"Name?" "Pierre Calorguen."

"Age?" "Thirty-five."

"Profession?" "Gamekeeper."

"Born?" "At Trigavou."

"Place of abode?" "With my mother, in a cottage built by General Houlbecq, near the castle."

"Do you know what you are accused of?"

"Yes, of killing my colonel, as he was when I saved him out of the press at Gravelotte."

"The prosecution does not underrate your military services. But fifteen years have elapsed since the war with Prussia."

"During all of which General Houlbecq overwhelmed me with kindness."

"True, and beyond your power to deny, as everybody in the district knows that you owe all you have to him. Hence the crime of which you are accused is only the more shameful."

"But I did not do it."

"That must be proved and this trial will no doubt show it. I ask you to account to the gentlemen of the jury for the way you employed your time on the evening of November the 3rd, and all day of the 4th."

Without confusion and in no hastiness Calorguen repeated the explanations given to all the legal ferrets and badgers who had had their worryings at him. He spoke of his round by order of his master, on the night of the third, of his visit during the next afternoon to his traps laid over-night in Plumodan Wood, of his return by the park, where he stopped to measure the hole in the wall, and on his arrival home, where he found Mdlle. de Bourbriac. All this being clearly and simply uttered, the impression was excellent.

But the chief judge proceeded:

"The indictment does not dispute the accuracy of the first portion of your statement, but the conclusion is belied by a witness who saw you steal out of the grounds after having fired the gunshot, which you deny having even heard."

"Yes, Pillemer, the farmer of the Hunaudaie. Well, he's a liar."

"You impute false testimony to him? An easy means of defence. The gentlemen of the jury will hear this witness and will see which tells the truth. You have asserted on the preliminary investigation that Pillemer bears you a grudge because you informed against him for cutting timber unlawfully upon General Baron Houlbecq's property. Nothing is less substantiated; and besides, that would not be sufficient motive for a respectable farmer to risk being punished for bearing false witness."

"There may be others."

"State them!" cried the chief judge, rather surprised.

"Find them out yourselves," returned Calorguen, roughly.

"Prisoner, I must remind you of the respect due to justice. Your tone in reply to the bench is unseemly and cannot be allowed."

"He's wrecking his chances," muttered Olivier.

Calorguen had sense enough to keep silent and the presiding judge went on less severely.

"It is for your own good that I recommended calmness. You allege that Pillemer feels malice against you for reasons unknown to us. Your course is one I advise you to alter. Understand me fully. Your position is that of one accused who denies everything but explains nothing. The jury will naturally believe a witness who has no interest in deceiving. Your position will be changed greatly if you enlighten the court. General Houlbecq was murdered. You deny it was by you. This will not suffice. But, if you know the culprit—if you only suspect somebody and name him, search will be made for the real assassin."

"Keen, this judge is," thought Derquy, "but I doubt he will get Calorguen to answer his decoys, though Calorguen must know more than has come out."

Indeed, the prisoner said nothing.

"I grant with pleasure that there are blanks in the indictment," proceeded the judge. "The cause of the crime is not clear. But it must be attributed to enmity, by whomsoever committed. Now, you have been ten years dweller at Trigavou, after having served in the general's regiment, and it follows you may be able to point out somebody he offended."

Calorguen made no answer, but he frowned as if constraining a strong inclination to speak.

"Make no mistake about our intentions. The court does not lay snares for prisoners. On the contrary, it seeks to arm you against a tendency noticed in exceptional cases. Persons accused submit to a feeling of delicacy, unfounded, however—for instance, they hold back the truth lest it should injure, say, a woman."

Here Calorguen blanched and lowered his head; he had to struggle against rising emotion, under all eyes fixed upon him. A revelation was expected, and the ladies present would not have given up their seats for a bushel of Kohinoors. Chancing to be watching the jurors, Derquy saw that Trigavou was more pale than the prisoner, and, for the first time, he feared that Flavia might be in danger from the keeper's statement. Since he had learnt her criminality with the count, he was ready for anything.

"You hear me, prisoner, and you have understood me," continued the chief judge. "If you stand as I suggested, I enjoin you not to keep silent. Tell all you know without concerning yourself as to the consequences. It is the best means of justifying yourself."

At this moment a pin could be heard to drop, as the saying is, and a sound did rise in the depths of the hall where the vulgar herd were standing. There was a scuffle and a cry, deep if not loud, of "Turn him out!"

Derquy fancied the cause of the disturbance was a boy, who, having stolen into the hall, tried to work his way to the forefront amidst the auditors, who resisted him with threats and kicks.

"Ushers, remove any person making a disturbance," was the command from the bench.

But order now already re-established, the officers had not remarked the lad who had gained his end. There he stood between the reserved seats and the amphitheatre occupied by the jury, over against the dock, and looked wistfully at the privileged spectators, seeming to say: "Don't drive me away. I'll behave myself." So the ladies at hand would not betray him. They thought him interesting, and he was so, though clad as a mere crow-scarer.

Derquy, nearly in front of him, gave him no further heed, on finding he was a stranger; yet he believed Calorguen had exchanged a glance of intelligence with him.

"We await your answer, prisoner," said the mouthpiece of the bench.

"I have not clearly understood your question," returned Calorguen after a fresh pause, as if he were trying to gain time, as the lieutenant, for one, conjectured.

"You are asked," continued the scarlet-robed judge, "if the crime of which you are accused was committed by one whom you scruple to denounce. You see that we treat you leniently, as if you might not be guilty of firing the fatal shot, or, if you fired it, but of being instigated. My duty is to observe that you would be less guilty, in this latter case, and the Public Prosecutor would himself claim a condemnation mitigated by extenuating circumstances."

"Had I been the death of my benefactor, I would not deserve it."

"So you continue to maintain that you did not kill him? I return to the question already addressed you—if not you, who was it?"

"How am I to say? Others than I would profit by my old colonel's death. My wish was for him to live as long as possible, for I wanted no other master."

"The only person who would benefit by that decease is Mdlle. de Bourbriac, her sister-in-law, whom he constituted his sole legatee in a will executed two hours previous to his death. Do you assert that this lady——"

"She is as innocent as I myself."

"You do well to declare so. The lady has been summoned as a witness, and if you should accuse her, she will have no trouble to defend herself against a shameful and absurd imputation. I suppose you do not accuse the Baroness of Houlbecq, who has lost everything through the death of her husband, whose mourning still she wears?"

"Ask Lady Houlbecq if she believes me guilty!" interrupted Calorguen, whose eyes were fixed on the jury box.

"Lady Houlbecq will not appear before us. But her written deposition will be read during this trial, in which, we may remark, your name is not even mentioned. It is restricted to what she actually witnessed."

"I daresay my lady has good reason not to go beyond that."

This unexpected retort raised a prolonged sensation, one in which Olivier Derquy shared largely. He foresaw that Calorguen was about openly to accuse the baroness, and she interested him less than before, since what had lately happened at Dinan. Still Lady Houlbecq was Vivette's sister, and Vivette herself was waiting in the witnesses' room. What a pain and what shame to have the bench discuss the evidence of Calorguen before her, evidence which might be supported by proofs that would be overwhelming to the veteran's relict. Calorguen had said enough to make one fear what he withheld. The chief judge did not fail to press him home.

"Prisoner," said the judge, "you seem inclined to follow the line we pointed out. I entreat you to continue, but enjoin your uttering nothing but the truth. Hold nothing back, but offer no venturesome assertions. I must remark that in all the preliminary examinations you never uttered a word bringing your master's most honourable widow into the question. Your fresh allegations will have to be considered, and, as Lady Houlbecq must be heard in reply, the whole case will have to be referred to the next session. Reflect on your words before you put forward an accusation which may harm you rather than serve you."

"I have thought it over," responded Calorguen, keeping his gaze fixed upon the Count of Trigavou in the front row of the jurors. "I know quite well that I may ruin my case. If I did not, my lawyer would tell me, for I see his signs to me."

His advocate, indeed, was telegraphing to him and bidding him stop, in an undertone.

"I also foresee that I may not be believed, but my conscience supports me and I shall be doing only my duty in helping justice to punish the real criminals."

"You have talked round the point enough—name them!"

"Oh no! I did not see the deed done. I received an order to do it, but I did not obey. Whoso gave it me found a villain to carry it out."

"A villain! That's too vague," rejoined the judge. "Why do you not speak plainly? Do you still hold your peace? Confess that you waver because you cannot furnish proofs in support of your declaration."

"On the contrary, I only hesitate because I promised to be silent, and I hate avenging myself."

"Avenge—on whom and for what?"

"On them who tried to kill me."

"When?"

"In my prison in Dinan."

"Eh? how can you hope that to be credited? You were in solitary confinement and nobody came near you but your warders and Dr. Avangour. But, letting that pass, was this order to kill the general given you verbally?"

"No; in writing."

"Can you produce that writing?"

"At once."

There were murmurs of surprise immediately suppressed by officers of the court, and everybody redoubled attention.

"I can hardly think you mean you have it upon you? You must have been searched on arrest, as well as at Dinan and here."

"I knew that would be done, so I took care not to keep the writing; I entrusted it to somebody."

"Name this custodian and I will write a summons for attendance."

"He is here already, sir."

"Ah, in the witnesses' waiting-room?"

"No. I did not have him called, because I intended to hold my tongue. But I have changed my mind during the trial. He has come without being called, and somehow has got in."

"Point him out."

Calorguen beckoned, and to the stupefaction of the ladies on the reserved chairs, up sprang the little boy who had crept among them and stood forward. Yvon faced Calorguen.

# CHAPTER XXXVII

## THE LITTLE PIN ON WHICH THE TRIAL TURNED

At this theatrical surprise, everybody sprang up to see the boy who possessed the key to this mysterious affair, excepting the judges and three or four jurors who had gone asleep or were hard of hearing. Count Trigavou, however, was among the seated ones, twirling his moustache as if trying to hide his face.

"Silence, gentlemen!" shouted the ushers.

"Let that boy come nearer," ordered the judge in red, as soon as calmness prevailed again.

The lad had advanced a step, but with his eyes ever upon Calorguen as if he obeyed none other.

"Who are you, my little friend?" asked the presiding judge.

"My name's Yvon."

"That's only your Christian name. What was your father called?"

"Langrolay; he is dead."

"Where do you live?"

"In Mother Calorguen's cottage in Trigavou."

"Oh, the prisoner's mother's? In her service?"

"I take care of the sheep and I go into the woods when Pierre sends me."

"So I said. Gentlemen of the jury, you will properly appreciate the declarations of a sheep-boy who lives with the prisoner. What brought you here? St. Brieuc is very far from Trigavou."

"I walked it, though! I knew Pierre was going to get tried."

"Well, tell us what else you know."

Yvon consulted Calorguen with a look.

"Keep your eyes on me," said the chief, sternly. "The prisoner says he handed you a paper."

"That he did, master," rejoined the boy, after a fresh exchange of glances with his friend.

"Do you know what is written on this paper?"

"Oh no, master; I can only read print; and besides, Pierre bade me not look at it."

"When did he give it to you?"

"Ever so many weeks ago, about eight."

"On the day the gendarmes arrested him?"

"Oh no, afore that; the evening of the day our master was shot—as we were having supper."

"What did Calorguen say in giving it you?"

"Not to show it anybody and stick to it till he asked it back."

"Then you have it in your pocket?"

"Yes, I've got it safe enough, but not in my pocket."

"It matters not where it is—show it to us."

This time, without heed of the dignitary's injunction, Yvon turned boldly round to the dock, waiting for Calorguen to confirm the request. At this juncture, Derquy, enwrapt in the scene, saw a lady in the second row of chairs raise her half veil and fix her eyes on Calorguen. He shuddered, for he recognised Baroness Houlbecq.

How came she to be at the trial after beseeching and obtaining leave not to appear, and what was she trying to do here? He was not slow to comprehend, the only one so to do, for nobody noticed the dumb parley of the accused and the lady, whom neither her neighbours nor the judges knew. Count Trigavou could not spy her from his position. On the other hand, Derquy, in an elevated situation, could study both her and Calorguen.

Yvon was standing at the entrance to the clear space and looked only at the prisoner, who looked only at Lady Houlbecq. The youngster's eyes questioned; the lady's implored; Calorguen's threatened.

"Well?" persisted the judge. "That paper!"

Yvon never budged. But Derquy saw the gamekeeper dart a withering look upon the baroness and not to the urchin as one would say: "Show the writing."

"Here it be, master," replied Yvon, thrusting his hand under a woollen garment serving as overshirt and waistcoat. It took him some time to rummage out the note in the pouch common to folk scantily clad, and meanwhile Flavia continued to supplicate the impassible Calorguen. She seemed to say: "Will you not have mercy on me?" and genuine tears rolled down her cheeks.

Yvon's hand clawed forth a small leaf folded in four—the leaf on which Baroness Houlbecq had written: "Rid me of him."

Court, jury, audience—privileged or not—watched the boy who grasped the solution of the trial. With poignant anxiety Derquy followed the play of features in Calorguen and his temptress. She wept and her suppliant gaze would have melted a tiger. Profoundly moved, Calorguen visibly blanched.

"Usher," said the judge, "bring me that paper."

For the last time Yvon questioned Calorguen ocularly, but he replied with an energetic shake of the head, as "No! do not obey." Yvon understood it and was about to thrust the note back again under his frock.

"Seize it!" commanded the judge.

A gendarme stepped forward to reinforce the court officials. Yvon was not in condition to defend Calorguen's trust, but he had an inspiration. Up flew his hand to his mouth with the note, he champed it into a pellet—presto! he had gulped it down. Outcries uprose from every quarter and the chief judge lost his self-command.

"Arrest that little rogue!" he called out.

The gendarme collared Yvon and was going to lug him out of the hall.

"Stay," said the scarlet-robed judge. "Put him on a bench there and guard him closely. In virtue of my discretionary powers, I order that child to remain during the audience. I shall question him myself in due course and have his evidence taken down."

Yvon, nowise appearing daunted, let himself be shoved upon a stool near the very spot where he had been crouching before he made himself prominent.

Lady Houlbecq had already dropped her veil. The ladies at her side had perceived nothing, their whole attention being concentrated upon the scene passing in the midst of the court-room. Everybody had seen the mute colloquy of Calorguen and the urchin, but none divined the cause of the prisoner's hesitations. They all thought he had cast away his life. Such was Lieutenant Derquy's opinion, though he had only a glimpse of the truth.

"Gentlemen of the jury," began the presiding judge, "you will fitly rate the system of defence adopted by the accused. It consists in hinting that he was urged to the crime by a person whose honourable character has never been impugned. The piece of jugglery which you have witnessed was prepared beforehand, and the pretended order which this child seemed to put away was never written on the paper. Before the end of this hearing we will return to this reprehensible farce. In the meanwhile the witnesses will be heard. The accused man may now be seated."

Calorguen profited by the permission to rest his elbows on the spiked edge of the desk, holding his head between his hands, doubtlessly to resist the temptation to look any more at Baroness Houlbecq, and listening absently to his counsel whispering to him. Visibly he felt no interest in the debate where his head was at stake.

The judge stated the case briefly, and mentioned the fact of General Houlbecq revoking his will by a fresh one, enriching his sister-in-law, and his having the tower door nailed up. On these incidents gossip had expatiated at length, but the bench attached no weight to them in connection with the case, and left the jury to draw their own conclusions.

Allusion was then made to Calorguen's sudden and recent accusation of an attempt on his life in Dinan Gaol. It is true the prison surgeon of St. Brieuc had remarked on the new-comer the fresh wound from a firearm of small calibre; the wounded man would not give any explanation, and now he refused to attribute the act to any one.

Here the clerk read Lady Houlbecq's affidavit. It merely repeated facts already known, and could not interest the generality. None but Derquy and Calorguen knew that the writer was listening to it without her betraying her identity.

The procession of witnesses began in an order arranged by the bench, and Mdlle. de Bourbriac took the lead.

Derquy eagerly awaited her coming, and his heart beat hard to see her, pale and trembling, reach the witness-stand without a look at a single soul, even for him. She recovered at the judge's first words, and her examination was abridged by his kindness. She had seen nothing from arriving home after the crime, and she was not obliged to volunteer what she knew about the Count of Trigavou. Without gravely drawing the baroness into it, she could not mention her find in the old tower. She wished to save Calorguen, but not to betray her sister, whom she little dreamt to be close by her. Her replies were so much to the purpose that she was not cross-examined, and she was soon politely asked to retire, of which permission she instantly availed herself, not without bestowing a little nod of encouragement upon the accused. She left the place, without having remarked Derquy, or Trigavou, or even little Yvon, half-eclipsed by his gendarme guardsman. She was going to wait outside for Dr. Avangour, whose examination directly followed hers.

The worthy doctor came equipped at all points, having prepared his professional statement in foresight of all queries. The judge told him that he need not stay any longer from his anxious patients.

Plaintel was next questioned about the will of General Houlbecq and Vivette's intention of renunciation, from which he dissuaded her, as in no case would the fortune go to the widow.

Justice Miniac and Corporal Grisaille came then, the former rather favourable to the prisoner, the other bluntly inimical. Both, having played an active part in the investigation, were only called to confirm the proceedings in the early stages.

In short, nothing yet altered the prisoner's position, and but for the little Yvon incident Derquy would have hoped for acquittal.

Commander Jugon was called and marched to the witness-stand with an assured step and haughty head, and took the oath in his most sonorous voice of issuing orders to a man on the highest spar. He was not intimidated, and Derquy, having the remembrance strong of their visit to the waxworks, thought that the old sea-dog would bark pretty savagely at the most dangerous accuser of Calorguen, and he was not wrong.

M. Jugon related his meeting with Dr. Avangour and Lieutenant Derquy on the Boulevard des Italiens, and their meeting Pillemer in the vault of the Grévin Museum. He concluded by asserting that Pillemer must have come into his house at Lanvollon on St. Hubert's evening in order to give the general a letter as he left dinner, inducing him to return instanter to Trigavou Castle. Upon this, the bench styled it sheer supposition, inasmuch as no such letter had been found on the general or in any of his desk drawers, and that, over and above this, the fact if proven only indirectly linked itself with a crime committed twenty hours after General Houlbecq's leaving.

The judge paid no heed to Pillemer's run up to Paris, no doubt because it was news to him, and it would not do to deem it of any consequence.

The gallant commander put so much heart in belabouring Pillemer that judges and hearers smiled more than once. But the veteran was highly esteemed in the entire country; the chief judge heard him out politely, and when he was done begged him to remain in court.

"Gentlemen, you are going to hear this man, and you can rectify his testimony on occasion, commander. Call the witness Pillemer."

Pillemer entered from the waiting-room. Derquy, who had not seen him since the Paris trip, hardly knew him again, his rustic habiliments not much better becoming him than the ready-made suit he wore in Grêvin's Museum. He appeared much less embarrassed than then, and reached the stand with a steady step.

All eyes were fixed upon him, amid a profound hush. He took the oath without stammering.

"Ugh! As many lies as there are words," muttered the prisoner.

On the night of November 3rd, Pillemer kept to his farm, he said, going to bed early, as he always did, particularly when his master was away, and his master had left the previous evening. In the evening, though, he had been over to Lanvollon, where he was used to hobnob with Commander Jugon's lads. That was on his way home, and he had some cider with them, sitting in the kitchen, where there were a lot of folk, servants of the gentlemen out for the hunt. They were all drinking "luck" together, and he joined in. But he only rested a quarter of an hour.

"Commander Jugon affirms that you pretended to leave, but stole up to General Houlbecq's room to leave a letter there to induce his immediate departure," broke in the presiding judge.

"Law! Do'ee want to make out that I got the poor gentleman killed? Why, bless him, he ne'er done a wrong to me! I hardly know him by sight, come to that!"

"Then you maintain that Commander Jugon is in error?"

"I'm afeared he is."

"Anybody can deny," growled the commander from his corner.

"You admit at least that you went up to Paris?"

"I did that, and a huge heap o' foolishness I did. My master pitched into me strong, and I spent as much silver as would make a parcel as big as me! Hows'ever, I have seen the capital."

This reply was underscored by a heavy sigh, which made the coarser public laugh. These Bretons—the Shylocks of France—were entertained by the confession of one of their fellows having actually paid in hard cash to gratify a sentimental longing. Derquy more and more suspected that Pillemer had gone to Paris to confer with Lord Trigavou. The latter remained unaffected in his seat, as if nothing concerned him. But the judge-president, less well informed on the count, continued without thinking of that interview:

"It little matters, in any case, that you should have absented yourself during the investigations. Your testimony was recorded. You had the right to go and come as you pleased. Now, repeat to the jury all you declared to the judge who examined you at Dinan."

Pillemer promenaded his fingers in his hair like a lout, not knowing how to begin a tale.

"Do not be confused. Tell us what you saw the day but one after St. Hubert's Day——"

"Well, then, I were going to the cow-doctoress at Plouer to ask her to come over to the Hunaudaie for to see one of the beasties that was sick—ay, and he died of it—a pig, if your honours will excuse me naming such a thing——"

"Stick to the case!"

"Yes, your honour, we had to stick it, in this case, but it was a narrow squeak. It did just bleed, and we could run the carcase into market, but I would not eat pork for a month. Well, she wasn't in, being called over to Taden about a calving, so I returned all alone by myself to the Hunaudaie. My road was that skirting the end of Trigavou Castle Park. I spied, away off, a man coming out of the ground by a break-down in the wall, who takes a gun under the briars at the edge of the woods and creeps stealthily along up to the gates. There I lost sight of him, and the next instant I hears a gun go off. I thought he had knocked over a rabbit, or an owl, and I went my way without stopping. But I had recognised Pierre Calorguen."

"What distance were you at?"

"A hundred or a hundred and fifty paces—I can't tell 'zactly."

"What time was this?"

"About a quarter to five—maybe a little more."

"On the 4th of November the sun set at 4.33," interposed the counsel for the defence, holding up the Almanac of the Bureau of Longitudes. "Hence it was dark at the time when you assert you recognised Calorguen."

"You'll excuse me, sir; it were not as bright as broad day, though one could see clear enough. But I may be wrong in a few minutes. I do not wear a watch."

"Prisoner," said the judge, "having heard the witness, what do you say?"

"That at the utmost he might have seen me take my gun from the bankside, where I placed it because it was in my way in measuring the breach just inside. This strikes me as very strange, for if he saw me I must have seen him—and I saw nobody at all. However, that might be so; but what cannot be is having seen me slip into the grounds by the gates, for, after taking up my gun, I struck off straight home through the woods by the shortest cut. And it is not possible he heard the gun go off, for I never heard it, yet I was nearer the spot where it was fired than he."

"And I never heard it neither!" cried a shrill voice.

# CHAPTER XXXVIII

## DENOUNCED AS THE ASSASSIN

The fine shrill voice had been raised behind Pillemer, who turned round quite confounded, but few hearers had understood the purport of the outcry.

"Who dared to interrupt?" queried the judge-president.

"Please your honour," said the gendarme, having Yvon in custody, "it's this here little rascal."

"Bring him forward."

The boy was shoved out beside Pillemer, who looked down on him resentfully. Yet it was plain that he did not know him. He must have run across him somewhere about Trigavou, but he did not remember him. Curiously enough, Calorguen, though knowing him so well, was just as much astonished.

"Little friend," said the high judge, "you already disturbed the order ruling here by pushing within bounds where you had no business to be, as you were not called as a witness. Then you went through a farce no doubt made up between you and the prisoner. And now you interrupt without being asked to speak. My duty is to have you arrested."

Yvon made a submissive hanging of the head and arms.

"Do you understand me? I am going to send you to jail to begin with, and then into a house of correction."

Yvon did not heed; he was looking at Calorguen.

"Come, come," proceeded the judge, astonished at the bearing, "you are a mere child, unaware of the misbehaviour you have done. Why did you add to the prisoner's remark:

'And I never heard it'? Would you have us believe you were by when Calorguen took his gun off the bank?"

"'Course I would! I was there, but Pillemer wasn't."

"Then you mean to give evidence? Very well; do so. You are not old enough to take an oath, but in virtue of my discretionary power your statement shall be received. To begin with, What brought you near the castle, on the 4th day of November, at the hour when the crime was committed? Did Pierre Calorguen have you along with him?"

"Oh no, master; Pierre was out on his duty. I was coming home after picking up chestnuts. I stopped on the edge of the woods, over agin' the gap in the wall, and I see a man come out of the gates."

"Come out?"

"Yes, master. Pillemer says as how he see him go in. 'Tain't so at all, and that shows he wasn't never there."

Pillemer was going to rebuke him, but the judge silenced him by saying:

"You will have your turn to speak. Well," he went on to Yvon, "what did the man do whom you say you saw?"

"Just the other thing from what Pillemer makes out. He poked the gun under the brambles where he took it from and went away towards Plumodan. I was hiding in the thicket, so he passed close by without seeing me; but I had a fair look at him."

"And this man was not Calorguen?"

"Law, no, master. Calorguen was inside the grounds then, as I knew after. Calorguen had on his keeper's clothes, just as you see now, and that man wore a smock frock and a broadbrim. And he had nothing of the look of Pierre."

"So you had time to scan his face?"

"Rather! I remember that first-rate, and shan't forget it in a hurry. Why, I'd know him again anywhere, and after never so long, if he'll only show himself."

From the opening of this unforeseen examination the tenant of the Hunaudaie lost countenance and all the coolness exhibited up to the entrance of little Yvon on the judicial stage. His embarrassment attracted the judge's attention, who began to believe that all this tale might not be the lad's fancy. At the same time the idea struck him to put an unexpected question to Yvon :

"Do you see this man anywhere in the court at this moment?"

Yvon shook his head.

"Look at the witness Pillemer."

"Oh, it wasn't him I see there," answered the urchin without hesitating. "I've known Pillemer ever so long, and I didn't know the other. He's young and good-looking, and Pillemer is old and ugly."

There was a smothered laugh, for the comparison was amusingly blunt; but the crisis was so painful that silence was quickly re-established. Everybody felt that the knot of the trial lay in this boy's statement, a chance witness, but probably a true one, as he was not old enough to learn a lie.

"Nay, nay," continued he, "Pillemer was not there."

"If he was not there," took up the chief judge, "how could he have divined that a man took up—or laid down—a gun near the border of the woods? You yourself state it so. Therefore, Pillemer did not invent the fact. Only he draws a different inference than you. Still he saw what happened."

"He was up in a tree, then, for I should have spied him anywhere in the woods."

"I am sixty years old," interposed the farmer. "A pretty time o' life to be swarming up a tree, I don't think! It's much more in your way, you naughty boy, to perch in the boughs to pry about honest folks."

"Silence!" said the judge, imperatively. "None but I have the right to address this child."

"Oh, I am not afeard o' Pillemer," remarked "this child" coolly.

"I see that," pursued the presiding judge, "and I doubt your full comprehension of your own words. Your statement completely traverses that of the witness Pillemer. Consequently one of you two lies, and to lie at the justice seat is a crime punishable with penal servitude. My duty is to commit whichever of you is guilty of perjury for trial. And I mean to discover which it is. Witness Pillemer, do you persist in your statement?"

"Of course I do, your honour. I have sworn to all that once already."

"And you, Yvon?"

"As true as the good God up above hears me I am telling the truth."

"Mind that your affection for the prisoner does not carry you too far. Better confess that you made this up between you since—awhile since."

"Why, I never said a word to him of what I see while he were in the grounds. Look at his face now; he's as much astonished as you, sir, at what I am a-saying."

"But you may have hatched this unlikely tale all alone of a man hiding a gun—a man nobody knows—and never seen again by you——"

"'Tain't for the lack o' hunting for him, though!"

"Come, come, my boy, think this over again. Nobody here believes you. I read in the faces of the gentlemen of the jury that they think like myself that you are telling this story to save your friend. Turn round and you will see——"

Yvon mechanically turned round as directed, looked at the twelve faces idly, and then suddenly shouted:

"That's the man there!"

The lovers of strong mental liquors had already had several draughts since this trial opened, but this was a quencher.

With glittering eyes and arm outstretched, Yvon pointed at one of the jurors on the lowest row in the box.

From the nook where he had crouched till called forth by the judge the boy could not see the juryman whom he pretended to identify, and hitherto he had not looked in that direction. Now he saw the man in a front view, and closely. By moving more forward he might have touched him.

The audience quivered, the judges were startled out of their dignity, Calorguen was stricken with surprise, Pillemer dismayed, and the counsel for the defence, shooting his cuffs out of the sleeves of his gown ere emitting a torrent of eloquence upon the incident—all this formed a picture worth preserving on canvas.

Of all the players in this strange scene apparently the least affected was the juror singled out by Yvon. Sitting erect, with a haughty head, he disdainfully eyed the child, and smiled in opposition to the insolent gesture pointing him out.

This juror was Count Trigavou.

The agitation produced by the denunciation would have been still greater if the master of the Hunaudaie had been known to the majority present. But he had few relatives in the county; his name was on the jury register because by family tradition he preserved a residence there. But he almost never came to St. Brieuc, and most of the beholders had never seen him before, or even heard his name, which, as a singular feature of this trial, does not figure in it. The important action he had taken was unsuspected by the judges. Hence the Public Prosecutor allowing him to elude the challenge and take his seat.

But still there were some who knew pretty well how he stood. In the first place, Calorguen, who, after discovering his enemy was not dead, had perceived that the baroness's lover had murdered her husband in order to marry the widow. And Olivier, who saw the man in his true colours, who had once inspired him with blind confidence. And lastly, Lady Houlbecq. She had deceived herself deeply on the moral value of her beloved, but yet she had not suspected him of having slain her husband at the time when he asserted he was crossing the Channel to Southampton.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the judge of Yvon, who continued to keep his finger threatening the unwincing Trigavou.

"I mean that that's the man who hid the gun in the brambles. When I see him he wore a smock, and he's dressed like a gentleman now, but he's wearing the same face and it's the same man."

Alain shook his head without otherwise moving, and his proud silence favourably impressed the spectators.

"I am willing to admit that you deceive yourself unawares," went on the judge. "That is the only excuse for your accusing an honourable gentleman so absurdly. The juror whom you indicate is the Count of Trigavou, whom you must know, as he has property and spends the summer on it at the Hunaudaie Farm, near the house where you live. You must have met his lordship."

"Never! Oh, so he's Pillemer's landlord, eh? And you won't believe me when I say he fired off the gun! Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face! Don't you see that he's l'arned his farmer the tale? Pillemer only says what the Count of Trigavou ordered him to say, to get Pierre into trouble. Pillemer was not nigh the castle. Look at his face—why a mole could see he lies!"

The boy hardly exaggerated. Upset by the turn of things, Pillemer could hardly stand, and wore such a guilty look that the judge, who had been harsh towards Yvon, changed his battery.

"What are you in such agitation for?" he demanded of the farmer.

"I—I do not know what you are all at me for," stammered he. "I have never done anybody wrong; but you are all down on me. Here's Commander Jugon accusing me of taking a letter to Lanvollon to decoy the old general into a trap. I never took no letter, and it's no fault o' mine that he was shot two days after. And now again here's this little varmint makes me out a liar."

"And so you are a liar—a liar indeed," shouted Yvon, "as true as your master's a murderer!"

Trigavou turned pale, with wrath very likely, but still he restrained himself.

The judge itched to examine him; but to question in court a juror denounced by a volunteer witness was so contrary to the rules of procedure that he abstained from yielding to temptation. He took the only course open in such an unsolvable problem. One of the two contradictory witnesses was a perjurer, and as neither would retract, the conflict might go on for ever. Whereupon the bench, the Public Prosecutor, and the counsel for the defence agreed what to do.

The Public Prosecutor rose to request the adjournment of the trial to the next Session, and the provisional arrest of both Pillemer and Yvon.

Calorguen's advocate offered no opposition, and after a deliberation among themselves, the judges arranged the terms of a decree which the president promulgated.

Upon the cry, "The case is adjourned," indescribable hubbub arose as the warders and gendarmes removed the prisoners. The audience pressed towards the doors; the fine ladies, disappointed at not beholding more than a makeshift for the last act, flocked into the central reservation; the jurors, delighted with liberty, scrambled out of the box; and the judge chatted with the dignitaries in the reserved seats next the bench.

Deeply affected, Derquy remained standing, instead of mingling with any groups, the isolated beholder of the breaking-up. He saw Yvon and Pillemer marched away, and Lady Houlbecq, more carefully veiled than ever, vanish in the throng. He looked round for the Count of Trigavou, astonished that he was left free, and saw him climbing up by the raised judges' seats and accosting the chief judge. A ring gathered round them, but both spoke in a high enough voice for Vivette's cousin not to lose a word of an interesting dialogue.

"My lord," said Trigavou with a splendid calm, "I must thank you for not having taken seriously the fictions of a little peasant wholly devoted to Pierre Calorguen. But I cannot rest under a slander, however stupid it may be ; and I beg to request my being cited as a witness at the next trial of this man. In the meantime, I hold myself at the call of justice. The jury is discharged, and I intended to go up to Paris this evening; but I shall stop at the Hunaudaie, unless you order me to remain here in St. Brieuc."

"We need only have your address for the summons to reach you when the case comes on again," replied the judge, politely but coldly. "I shall inform the Public Prosecutor of what passes between us and leave him to take the measures necessary to secure the operations of justice. I suppose you will await his decision ? I shall telegraph your intention to stay at your house at the Hunaudaie."

"Meanwhile I may retire ?"

"You are perfectly free to retire, my lord."

An emphatic nod with this reply cut short the colloquy.

Trigavou hastened to avail himself of the permission, descended from the daïs, threaded the groups, and mingled with the people, jostling and elbowing to get out of the hall.

Derquy endeavoured to overtake him for one of those disputes which end in a duel, but as he meandered through the body of the court-room encumbered with lawyers, newspaper correspondents, and natives of both sexes, Commander Jugon buttonholed him to impart his opinion of the trial. The old sea-dog did not spare Count Trigavou, and thundered against the judge's weakness in not having him arrested on the spot as General Houlbecq's assassin. That was the very word he used, and Derquy did not remonstrate against the epithet applied previously by little Yvon.

Derquy managed to shake his brother officer off at the doors of the hall of justice, thinking only to rejoin Vivette to acquaint her with the result of the trial and, above all, that her sister was at St. Brieuc. He knew that the arrangement was for Vivette to meet Dr. Avangour on the footway outside They might still be there, so he hastened thither as also on his way to his hotel as well.

The trial had been long and night was closing in. The throng, still discussing what they had seen and heard, had gone on from the square into the Valley of the Gouet, a steep approach to the little port. The boulevard was almost deserted, and all the persons he noticed were two, the Lord of Trigavou and a lady in mourning.

"They fixed on the same meeting-place," muttered the naval officer, "and we all have nearly come in collision. What the better shall I be for driving Lady Houlbecq to confess she is that scoundrel's mate—or, maybe, accomplice? If she set him on to shoot her husband, I'd rather not know it. As for the villain himself, I hope he will flee the country and never be heard of more. But if he dares to remain, I must have it out with him. I will not let him be tried, for he's just the coward to let all out and Heaven knows what would become of Vivette's sister!"

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE LOVERS PREPARE FOR FLIGHT

Derquy saw correctly. It was really Lady Houlbecq and her associate upon the broad walk. She had gone thither directly upon leaving the court-room, knowing he would come as they had prearranged everything. They had pretty well foreseen everything, too, except the interruption of the boy—unknown to Trigavou, and accounted an idiot by the baroness.

They were obliged now to meet the consequences of this terrible incident, and they were not in accord on the means. They mutually hurled reproaches at one another for having gone near the court.

"What made you take a place among the jury?" asked the lady. "Had you followed my advice we should not be in this dilemma."

"Come to that, what brought you into the court?" retorted Alain. "I forbade you coming."

"How handsome in you to reproach me!" returned the lady. "If I had not signalled to Calorguen he would have denounced you. That little wretch who recognised you a little later actually held the leaf out of my tablets and was going to give it to the judge, but I raised my veil, looked at Calorguen, and he took pity on me——"

"Yes, I saw what went on and fully understood that you only thought of pulling me out of the nasty corner. You succeeded, but I was out of luck. Before, I was not in the coils, but, by Heaven! they are all around me now."

"Your own fault. If you had not come Yvon could not have recognised you."

"How could I foresee he would be there? If I had not appeared after being regularly called, my absence would have been remarked, and it would have been conjectured I had my reasons to keep away. Several persons suspected me without giving tongue. I may name Avangour, Jugon, aye, and others—curse them all! I chose to dare the danger of some direct question, but unexpected was the quarter whence it came. Facts have proved me in error. Now we must come to some conclusion."

"Do you mean you want my advice?"

"Yes, but I shall not follow it unless I deem it good."

"No doubt that implies that you separate your future from mine. Just what I looked for," observed the baroness bitterly.

"You have nothing to fear; you are not pointed at."

"Wait till the trial comes on anew—when Calorguen will speak, or if he does not, Pillemer will. He has no reason to hold his tongue and he is in prison now."

"Pillemer! the traitor! Instead of bothering about the keeper, I ought to have put a bullet into him!"

"'Twas he who betrayed us to my husband!"

"I did not wish to believe, but I am sure on that head now."

"So he knew of our intimacy?"

"He nosed it out. I had set him to work spying old Houlbecq, not telling him why, but he's sharper than he looks. On St. Hubert's eve I sent him over to Lanvollon. When he returned he reported the general still at table before sleeping at Jugon's and going a-hunting in the morning. That's what determined me to stir out, and luck led me into the castle less than an hour before your husband arrived——"

"Why did Pillemer betray you?"

"I daresay because he hoped Houlbecq would kill me. I paid him liberally for his services, but I was fool enough, with a view to hold him closer, to intimate that I had him down in my will for twenty thousand francs. He was in a hurry to inherit. I know no other reason."

"But when you saw him, after the event, you could not help taking him to task——"

"I did not believe it was his work. I was so far off that on my return home I wrote him to come up to Paris to learn what had occurred at Trigavou after my departure. He came up. He did nothing but blunder. To avoid his meeting me in my lodgings, I told him where I should expect him; Monceau Park, the Grévin Museum, and so on, and everywhere he fell in with people that knew him down here—Dr. Avangour and Commander Jugon, for instance—two enemies. I chanced upon the last meeting just to hear Jugon accuse him of having lured Houlbecq into a trap. It was only then I began to mistrust Master Pillemer. The day but one after I hauled him over the coals, but he stood out stoutly, and I finally believed I was wrong to blame him."

"Yet you knew he had Calorguen arrested?" queried the baroness.

"Yes," answered the count abruptly.

"Did you not see him after St. Hubert's Night?"

"I daresay I did. Why the question?"

"Because you told me in Paris that, on the night when we were nearly caught, you went to St. Malo, merely looking in at your farm without seeing Pillemer, and embarked two days after."

"You really want to know, eh? Well, have it, then! What I did was this: When I escaped from the old tower I had no idea of fleeing into England, where nothing drove me, since nobody could prove I was in the castle. So I simply went to bed in my farm-house and strictly kept indoors all next day. But on the next morning I burned to know what had gone on at Trigavou, and did not care to send Pillemer, who did not inspire me with enough confidence. So I disguised myself as a peasant to prowl round the castle—a broad-brimmed hat and an ample frock——"

"Then it was you Yvon saw?"

"I can't say the little imp saw me, but I saw nobody but Calorguen. That was from a distance, stealing along the wall.

I saw him halt, lay his gun on a sloping bank, and climb over through the breach. I wondered what he was after and resolved to learn. You told me he was in love with you, remember. I went up the road and passed the breach without his seeing me. His gun was within reach, and I snatched it up to prevent him using it against me in case he perceived me. It then occurred to me to slip into the grounds by the gateway and take a peep at your window. I cannot say why, but I was urged to commit that imprudence. I did glide in and I stepped to the edge of the lawn, when, on raising my head, I saw your husband standing at the open window. He saw me, too, and, what's worse, recognised me, for he called out: 'What are you about there, you? Are you looking for me?'"

"That is true. I heard him."

"And he added, shaking his fist, 'You will soon know with whom you have to do. Just wait till I get down to you.' Then I thought of you, dear. I saw that if I let him live he would torture you lingeringly till death, for he knew by this time who was your chosen and that I had escaped the dungeon where he fancied I was shut up. Tit for tat was fair play. I had a right to avenge myself."

"And you fired on him! Well done!" cried the widow, brutally, carried away by her passion.

"No, no, badly done, for I shall be found guilty of it, and you must pay the penalty too. Well, I had time to rush out of the grounds and put the gun back where I found it. And I returned to my farm without meeting a soul. It was then only I thought to leave the country for a month, and off I went that night."

"What about Pillemer?"

"Pillemer knew nothing about it. But he had seen me come in and I had to explain away somehow why I had disguised myself. He would hear of the general's death next day and I did not want him to suspect I had slain him. So I hatched a tale, part true, part false, telling him I had donned a smock to go near the castle without being recognised. I knew well enough he would not inquire what took me there, being in the secret. I went on to say that when skirting the park walls I heard a gun go off, that I had seen Calorguen measuring the hole in the wall a moment before, and that a moment after I saw a man hide a gun in the bushes and make off without my seeing his face. I added that the man may have blazed away at somebody, but I had no inclination to get drawn into some awkward affair and that I preferred to go travelling awhile. I thought he might fancy what he liked, but he had no interest in speaking against me; and indeed, he took good care not to accuse me. I never foresaw he would saddle Calorguen with the story of the gun in the hedge, forgetting he has had a knife whetted for Calorguen this ever so long."

"But when you saw Pillemer again in Paris?"

"I treated him as he deserved and commanded him to retract his statement; but he answered that, if he did so, they would have him up for perjury and he would not promise me anything. Then I thought to help Calorguen escape from Dinan Gaol. The escape was a failure—ahem! well, you know the rest. Pillemer, at the first hearing, stuck to his tale, and all might have been lovely if he had not meddled and brought this yarn forward. Now I lay at Pillemer's mercy, and I am certain he will blab everything. The judge has given me rope enough, but when he lays his head alongside the Public Prosecutor's, they will decide to bring me up with a strong pull. I shall not wait."

"You mean to flee?"

"Fully determined. But nothing drives you. Calorguen will be dumb, as he adores you."

"And I adore you! What do I care that you relieved me of my husband? He meant to kill you and you retaliated too soon for him. I'll go with you, darling—anywhere! Come what may, your fate shall be mine."

"You will not taunt me any more with courting your sister?" queried Alain, ironically.

"Don't speak of her! I wish to forget everything, and I shall if you'll take me."

"Even to America? California, even, or the Antipodes? Though I quit France bent on never seeing it again, even if I change my name and I am reduced to work for a living? Even if they condemn me in my absence?"

"Do you doubt it? Have I not done enough for you to believe in my love?"

"I believe that love fades like every worldly thing and that you will harry me one of these days for having dragged you down with me in my fall."

"Hush! and don't you dare hope, sir, to prevent me going along. I am quite ready. I always foresaw what was coming, for I turned my funds into cash—three hundred thousand francs—banked securely in London. Where do you intend to sail from?"

"St. Malo. I'll go by evening train to Dinan, for I must show I was at the Hunaudaie Farm in case I am tracked from here. But I shall only stay one day. The day after to-morrow I shall be in St. Malo."

"Where you will find your loving one by the early morning."

"Fully determined?"

"Fully, and nothing shall change me, whatever you do or say."

"If that's so, mark me well; I must keep quiet. I reckon on there being nothing against me for a few days yet. But one must be forearmed, and I am not going to run the risk of being arrested. Before coming to St. Brieuc I had a presentiment Calorguen's trial would not end just as I wished, and that I might find the necessity of putting the sea between me and justice. What I foreboded has happened. I must provide for my safety. Just to think, though, that if that little demon Yvon had not come across me, Calorguen would be acquitted and no accusation would be overhanging me. It's enough to drive one wild with fury—dash it! Oh, it is a good thing they put him in prison, or else, if he fell under my hand, I'd wring his neck, although that would only be a blunder the more.

"But, to get back to my project of instant departure. At St. Malo I know an old pilot who owns a pretty little steam yacht which he lets out at a large profit to lovers of marine trips. I have more than once put some good things in his way by recommending him to rich Paris friends. He is a reliable fellow and I can trust him. He will take me anywhere I name—over to Ireland, where, at one port or another—Queenstown, Londonderry, where you will—the steamers touch from England to New York.

"Well, I notified him that I should require his boat within three days of this. That's settled, and so he's waiting under steam out of the bay at anchor beyond the breakwater. This captain, named Guevel, lives in Freshwater Canal Street, corner of St. Barbe Street. You can go to him from me and tell him to be ready to set sail the day after tomorrow, and even go on board yourself as soon as you like. It is useless, at any rate, our being seen together. I shall go to the Franklin Hotel, near old Guevel's house. I will see him straight and arrange with him. Should you be on board, he'll take me out in his yawl at night tide to the yacht, and in two hours we shall be far from St. Malo. Is this fixed? All right, then, let's part—our last parting, since now we are bound together till death comes."

"At last," sighed Flavia in relief, "you are mine own for ever and ever, without any rivalry."

The farewell was short, for Trigavou burned to shake the dust of France off his feet, and his temptress was eager to enjoy happiness so dearly earned.

Both forgot that there is many a slip betwixt cup and lip.

# CHAPTER XL

## A BED OF THORNS

In the summer-time all seaside resorts look alike. But in autumn the town recovers its natural aspect. Trouville becomes a fishing village, St. Malo the port which fitted out privateers. Gay life vanishes from the fine sands, and a duller bustle reigns in the port and in the docks. The Newfoundland fishing boats discharge their Grand Bank catches, the smacks form rows along the jetty, and the huge English packets load up butter, eggs, and calves for the London market.

With this relative loneliness as to fashionables and gentlefolk, Count Trigavou reckoned on meeting no acquaintances before embarking. As announced to Baroness Houlbecq, he had arrived by the last train and slept at the Franklin Hotel. It was then too late to see old Guevel, who went to bed at nine.

But the count was up with daybreak and ran round to the enriched pilot's, whom he found smoking his pipe in his doorway. His first care was about the lady he had sent to him.

"Oh, I saw her," answered the sea veteran. "She isn't no stick."

"In what way is that?" inquired the astonished nobleman.

"I offered her a room till you came, but, bless you, my lord, she would hardly stay ashore a quarter of an hour, so hot to be aboard ship right away."

"That was understood between us."

"So she said. But when you arranged that 'ere in course you never knew what kind o' weather the morrow would bring for'a'd. Why, yesterday I did have a hard pull for it to get out in a rowboat to my yacht. We took two hours to round Little Bey Island, and your lady got soaked like a biscuit in oyster soup. But she wasn't scared. I never did see such a heart o' oak in a woman."

"Yes; I know the sea would not frighten her. At what time can you take me aboard? Some time this morning I want to be off."

"Do 'ee, my lord? Well, now, that don't depend on me, d'ye see."

"On whom, then?" demanded the nobleman testily.

"On the clerk of the weather, who sent us yesterday a stiff norther. Didn't you give the sea a squint as you came? It's all over the Neck."

"It don't matter. As the lady got over so can I."

"That don't follow. It blew rough yesterday, but we could make head again it. But this 'ere day, there ain't a sea-going boat in all the port able to go out; she'd go down a couple of cables' length from the end of the breakwater. And anyhow, why run the risk of getting drownded? It's a goodish bit since the yacht left her moorings where she waited."

"What's that? Gone without me?"

"Yes, good luck to her! If she had hung on to her anchor, she would have been tossed on to the shingle of Big Bey Island and knocked into shivereens by now. I gave the skipper the order to put to sea, and he had enough on his hands to clear, I tell 'ee."

"Put to sea? Where to?"

"Nowhere's in pertickler. He's been spending the night tacking to and fro and must have had all the fun he wants running long and short legs. Your lady has had her 'prenticeship of nights at sea; but that's no blame to me, for I warned her. But she was bound to go on board. Howsomever, there's no danger—not a mite. The *Gullwing* is well built and has breasted many a blow. The lady will get off with a little shaking."

"When can the yacht get back?"

"Sooner than your lordship 'magines. These here gales blow 'emsels out in less than forty-eight hours. To-night it will taper off and come to a puff and a calm to-morrow."

"Then your boat will resume her anchorage?"

"Under the Big Bey, my lord. That's understood with the cap'n, and he's a man o' his word."

"Then I can embark to-morrow?"

"Yes. But the sea won't have gone down, and the yacht may be obligated to stand off and on under steam, d'ye see, instid o' mooring under the island. But if you are willing to wait in the hollow of the Big Bey, why, they'll send a yawl in for you. As soon as you are brung on deck, she'll stand for Ireland. Reckoning all in, you'll only lose a day."

"How shall I know the yacht has returned?"

"I'll come tell your lordship at the hotel."

"I would rather you were not seen there."

"I understand. Well, there's a way out of that. All your honour need do is get out to the Big Bey in the morning by the Good Help Gate. At nine the tide is a-running in, but you can still cross without wetting your feet. You should climb up the island and go along to the headland of Chateaubriand's Tomb, whence you'll see the yacht as plain as I see your lordship. She'll be cutting hereaway and thereaway before the island. I shall get out there too, a little later, and signal the skipper to lower away the boat as soon as the water is high enough to let her run in shore. There'll be never a soul there to ask your lordship for his passport, for this is not the season when the 'scursionists go out to see the Tomb."

"Well, be it so. If there's any change during the day, just stand out in your doorway at nightfall, where I can see you from my hotel window. I will step out on that balcony you see from here and you can beckon if you want to speak to me. If you do not call me, we will meet in the morning on the Big Bey, where I will cash up for the yacht hire."

Old Guevel replied that he could trust the speaker, and was in no hurry; he loved money, but he wanted to be polite too.

Nettled at this drawback, which condemned him to spend a day and a night yet at St. Malo, Count Trigavou thought of no better way to wear off his ill-humour than to walk round the ramparts. This constitutional promenade ought to blow away mental cobwebs, and make it clear that the *Gullwing's* proprietor had not stretched a point in calling the sea unnavigable.

He went to St. Vincent Square, crossed it, and climbed the stone steps to the broad flagged walk on the old seawall. He did not linger to regard the docks, the famous swing-bridge, nor the lofty houses of the rich shipmasters of yore, granite palaces towering over the battlements. He caught a view of the sea, only to be had beyond a large bastion covering the mole protecting the outer port. When above the Good Help Strand, Trigavou had his wish satisfied.

The tempest was raging in full force. The fog-shrouded horizon blended with the lowering sky. The north-west wind drove the rollers in upon the coast and smashed them on the rocky edges of the roadstead. Big and Little Bey Islands, Cezambre, and the Conchée disappeared under the spouts of surge.

Guevel had not exaggerated; no vessel had ventured out in the teeth of that gale, and those near enough had scudded in.

Far out, nearly by Cape Frehel, Trigavou fancied he saw a streak of black smoke across the dirty grey clouds, and he imagined it come from the *Gullwing's* smoke-pipe as she bravely struggled against the landward wind.

The count leant on the parapet to watch the yacht and query whether he ought not to wish her to go down with all aboard, or, at any rate, never make a French landing.

Already regretting their fortunes were bound together, he was eager to scramble out of the game before it was completely lost with his life and fame, rather than await the outburst of the tempest which Pillemer's probable confession would evoke. But this last scion of a noble stem knew neither scruples nor remorse. Educated by a sceptical father, he had from boyhood looked upon life as a battlefield where the victory falls to the most powerful and most skilful. The programme he followed so far inculcated preserving appearances, trampling prejudices underfoot, braving men, and despising women. It had worked well until he forgot the rules and slew the husband of his conquest. It was the blunder worse than a crime, but one it was waste of time to deplore.

"The die is cast," he said, still eyeing the yacht. "I shall go with her and abide events. All will end well yet. At present there is a substantial danger to elude. The future is my own and nobody knows what good fortune lies in store. Meanwhile, to breakfast."

After a last glance at the furious sea to which Cæsar was going to confide his fortunes he walked along the ramparts to his hotel, washed when above cover by the briny blast. When he reached the hotel leisurely enough he was glad to hear the breakfast-bell as he was sharpset. He dashed in though he might be running into danger.

His seat at the *table-d'hôte* placed him between an artillery officer on detached duty and Sir Harries Harrison, an English tourist. The conversation unfortunately turned upon the recent trial, and Lady Houlbecq was smartly castigated by the general voice. The debate so spread that it was shocking to the feelings of any respectable *table-d'hôte.* Count Trigavou and his neighbours alone did not enter into the wrangle.

"Ill-bred cattle," remarked the English baronet in an undertone, and in good French.

"Quite my own opinion," added Alain.

"And mine," concluded the officer. "It is unseemly to treat the widow of a general officer in this style. I knew Baron Houlbecq and met his wife in Parisian society, and never did I hear a word against her."

This led to a self-presentation, the Englishman giving his name and title, and the military Frenchman stating he was Count Jacques de Sacey, colonel. This put Trigavou in a quandary, for he could not name himself as the late juryman whom Yvon had singled out. He had shot down Baron Houlbecq, but he could not give a false name without a qualm. He whispered that he would acquaint them with his degree when they left the room. This reservation cast a a damper on the chat, though Trigavou hastened to show he moved in the upper circles. He succeeded in effacing the bad impression of his secrecy, but filled them with curiosity to know the cause. So they abridged the meal and walked out to enjoy the cigars Sir Harries offered in the smoking-room. There was only the courtyard to cross, but in that space Trigavou almost ran up against Lieut. Derquy, accompanied by a naval officer in undress, some old shipmate apparently.

Neither expected such a meeting.

Olivier, after seeing Viviana to Dinan, had followed Dr. Avangour's advice to leave her to go over to Dame Calorguen alone with the news about her son. So the lieutenant had come to St. Malo to get through the day somehow in company with a lieutenant promoted from his own ship to command the government despatch boat at St. Servan. Having invited him to breakfast, that brought them to the Franklin Hotel.

Trigavou stopped sharply on seeing Viviana's betrothed, the blood rushing to his head and his hatred for the rival making him oblivious of prudence.

"I shall join you presently, gentlemen," he observed to his neighbours, who went on towards the smoking-room. "A word with you alone, sir," he added to Derquy, who firmly faced him.

The latter friend understood the matter and stepped over to the steamboat posters on the wall.

"What's your desire?" inquired Olivier, coldly. "I have no words for you, and you ought to know that there's no connection between us."

"I know that one of us ought to have no longer connection with this world, and I want you to give me satisfaction."

"For what, pray? I spared you whom I might have destroyed. You shamefully slandered me towards Mdlle. Bourbriac. Which of us is the wronged man, then?"

"Oh, you can have the choice of weapons—all I care for is the fight."

"I could refuse that on the grounds of a man not being obliged to go out with one who may be in the hands of the police in a day."

"Do you mean you will betray me? I daresay you paid that little monkey to accuse me of shooting the husband of your sister-in-law to be."

"Your insults do not touch me. But you shall know I hold the proofs of one of your crimes. You tried to murder poor Calorguen though he was not the man to utter the word to ruin you. Do not attempt denial. I found the rope you sent into his prison, and I have measured it. You hoped he would drop off the end and split his skull on the rocks. And you shot him as he climbed up the rope. These are attempts at murder and no palliation."

"You're a liar."

Olivier turned pale but he restrained himself.

"Yes, you are a liar, and you are raking up excuses to avoid fighting me because you are a coward to boot," said Count Trigavou loudly enough to recall his late companions at the smoking-room door.

Derquy's friend had also overheard and he turned round. The face of affairs had changed. The lieutenant could not let things rest after he was treated as a liar and coward. He had to accept the duel or explain why he refused; in other words, inform strangers of the scandalous, sad misdeed whence sprang the quarrel. Thereupon the nobleman would not have shrunk from answering saucily and flinging Mdlle. de Bourbriac's name into the discussion.

"Gentlemen," said Derquy addressing the three bystanders collectively, "in your presence I have been rudely insulted and I require satisfaction of this gentleman by arms."

"Just what I require too," rejoined Lord Trigavou quickly, "and the sooner the business is over, the better."

"Lieutenant Allanic, my mate at the Naval College, will see your friends this day to arrange the meeting, if you have any friends still."

"Why not straight away ?"

"Be it immediately, then. Here stands Lieutenant Allanic ; where are your seconds ?"

Trigavou looked at his two table companions, more suitable than those to look for farther. If they accepted office, he would have to tell his name ; but even then they might not withdraw, once committed.

"Excuse me, sir," said the artillerist officer with a quickness leaving no doubt on his resolve to decline the honour from a stranger. "I am in attendance on the inspector-general and am engaged to-day and for to-morrow to visit with him the coast and island defences."

Clearly enough he had scented mischief in the wind and had no inclination to be prominent. But the English nobleman had no such reasons. He was an independent character, travelling as he listed and fond of unforeseen adventures. To be second in a French duel would be something to tell at the club. So he stepped forward whilst the cannoneer officer retired, and said to the count :

"If agreeable, sir, I will be your second."

"I accept gratefully," answered the other, "on condition that my adversary does not insist on another supporter."

"I have only one as yet myself," returned Derquy.

"And that the seconds do not learn the causes of our encounter ?"

"I pledge myself to be content," said the baronet. "I have a gentleman as my principal, which is ample."

"I will do whatever my friend assents to," added the sea-officer.

"Then we can regulate the conditions of the duel at once," proceeded Trigavou. "As I said, you have the choice of weapons, sir."

"My choice is made. You know that I was wounded so lately that I cannot hold a sword."

"True. We fight with pistols, without delay. To-day, eh?"

"You forget that it is near noon, and is dark at four. Besides, we must have a medical man at hand. One second a-piece may suffice at a pinch, but a medical attendant is indispensable, particularly as I mean we shall not cease firing till one is down. It will take time to find this gentleman; so we cannot meet till to-morrow morning."

"Be it so—where?"

"Anywhere you like."

"I suggest Big Bey Island," interposed Derquy's friend.

"Why the Big Bey?" queried the count. "There must be a score of places around St. Malo more suitable."

"None so near," replied the naval officer, "and I cannot go too far away from my advice-boat because I must go to sea to-morrow as soon as weather permits. I must look after fishing craft sure to be crippled by this gale. So I shall run out at the first lull."

"The Big Bey," repeated Sir Harries. "Let me see, that's the headland on which Chateaubriand the poet is entombed. I have not seen that yet. Very good."

"Yes, a capital chance," added Allanic, smiling. "No place is fitter. No one will disturb us—especially when the sea is in, and it will be high tide at noon. I can have my yawl out and take you by eleven to the Big Bey, if you will come aboard my cutter. It will hold five easily and my men can land us anywhere afterwards."

"We shall be but three coming back," remarked Trigavou, grimly. "We shall be less one whom the doctor will be attending to or laying out. I do not intend being of your return party, either, if I survive."

"As you please, sir. Then it is agreed, the Big Bey?"

"Yes, I shall be there at ten with Sir Harries. Now for the weapons?"

"I claim the shooting-gallery pistol," said Derquy.

"I have a pair of hair-triggers," said the Briton.

"So have I," added the cruiser's captain.

"That is good," pursued the count. "These gentlemen will bring their weapons and we will draw for them. Is this agreed ?"

"All points are agreed," concluded the lieutenant. "At eleven to-morrow we meet again on the island near the Tomb."

He drew his brother-officer out of the hotel instead of into the coffee-room as they intended. Allanic hastened to ask some explanation of the scene without any sense except that Derquy was to fight a duel to the death.

"I can say little," replied he plainly. "You know me well enough as not a man to risking life in a bad cause. If I die, Heaven will not be just. If I kill that man he will have been fitly punished. Ask me no more."

"Enough ! I see there's a woman in the case."

"Whether you have hit it or not, be sure that I am doing my duty. I picked no quarrel, you very well know, as we went there merely to breakfast. Pure chance brought me in contact with an enemy who insulted me. I would not shrink. Come what may, I have nothing to blame myself for."

"I am dead sure of that. Where are you towing me to ?"

"To the telegraph office, to send a message to a medical friend at Dinan."

"Why not call in a local practitioner or the army surgeon?"

"I do not wish to bring strangers into the affair. My doctor knows it already. He will come over on getting the despatch, and I will introduce him in the morning. We will breakfast afterwards, but not at the Franklin. I am glad I did not happen to put up there where that man was staying

Whilst the pair were on their errand, Count Trigavou had got free of Sir Harries, who had an appointment with a fellow countryman living at St. Servan. He arranged to be back in the morning and accompany his brother-aristocrat, for Alain had made himself fully known. The baronet expressed his hope that the fortune of war would be favourable to his principal, and declared that he was delighted to have a hand in such an event, as duels are things unknown in his country.

Trigavou was left to solitary reflection. He was more than ever decided to embark next day, but it would be glorious to be revenged on Derquy by preventing him marrying the fortune of Mdlle. de Bourbriac.

Still it was not without hesitation he accepted the Big Bey as the field of honour, for that was the island where the *Gullwing's* boat was to take him on board that vessel beside Lady Houlbecq. After all, the place chimed in capitally. As the hour was eleven, high water, he might get there two hours sooner as he agreed with old Guevel, and settle with him to have the gig land for him at half-past eleven, when the combat would be over.

A first-rate pistol-shot, Alain felt sure of killing his man if they fought advancing and firing at will. As the seconds and doctor ran to his help, Trigavou would slip away, and that would seem natural enough. He knew a path down to the waterside where the boat would run in, without being seen, as the duel would no doubt take place within the old fort in ruins. He would be aboard before the fallen man was found dead or mortally wounded.

"The first is best," added the count. "All depends on the weather. If the wind continue, the *Gullwing* will have to stand out. But I shall know the prospect to-night, for I shall see Guevel at dusk."

Trigavou had to get through the time somehow, and he shut himself up in a *café* to read the Paris papers, and even the local ones, which made him ferocious. All were full of the St. Brieuc trial, but the juryman singled out was designated only by an initial, and not a word was spoken upon Lady Houlbecq. This was pretty encouraging, but Alain could not expect things would stand there, and remained firm upon leaving France, with a chance of returning in case things came out well for him and bad for Calorguen.

A little before four he went to find old Guevel. Nods and becks from an hotel balcony seemed scant, since, beyond going to rejoin the baroness on the yacht, there were other questions than about the weather for the retired pilot. He met him coming out of the St. Vincent Square *café* and drew him into a nook by St. Thomas's Gate.

"Well, my lord, you see I touched the mark," said the old seaman. "The wind's lulling and will go down altogether to-night. What's your time for going aboard to-morrow?"

"I shall be on the Big Bey by ten."

"Rather late. You cannot pass dryshod."

"I don't care. I reckon on finding you there."

"Oh, I shall be there at half after nine, to give me time to signal my skipper to send in the boat."

"Let him put off at half-past eleven; no sooner. I shall have an English gentleman with me who asked me to show him the poet's grave, and I must get rid of him before I embark."

"All right, my lord. You'll find me on the beach at the foot of the first steps, for I want to get back to St. Malo before the tide is up. You can walk right up to me under the excuse that you are asking your way about. I'll tell you if the *Gullwing's* nigh and if you can go aboard at your own hour."

"That's first rate. I'll pay you your money then."

"No hurry, my lord. But bear in mind that if you idle about you won't be able to get away, for the Neck will be under water."

"Pooh! we'll manage somehow."

"One thing farther, my lord. Talking with a revenue officer, I heard that a general is down here to inspect the coast batteries and forts. The boats are ordered for him and his staff. They may even begin to-morrow with the two Beys."

"There's no works or cannon on the Big Bey."

"That's so, now, but there is talk of putting them there. The chances are the general will not get to work to-morrow, but it's my duty to tell your lordship. I've done it. Good-bye till to-morrow."

Trigavou went into his hotel and shut himself up till dinner, which he had in a private room, to avoid unpleasant neighbours. Leaving table, he went on the Neck for a smoke, and looking along the breakwater which links the mainland with the rock on which the town is built, he could prove that Captain Guevel had spoken the truth. The tempest was going down and there were tokens the wind would change in the night.

"Huzza!" said Trigavou to himself, "my luck's coming round. The yacht will be where I wanted it. I shall kill that beggar before I am taken off the shore, and be far hence to-morrow night. Poor Flavia!" he muttered ironically, "she must have had a jolly day and night of it. However, that will make her the more glad to see me again. How long will her joy last, though? We shall see. I am not pledged to pass my life in her company."

On this flattering conclusion for the baroness, the count went back to the hotel by deserted streets. Sir Harries had not returned, and so the noble villain betook himself to bed, where he slept as soundly and sweetly as Argyle in his last slumber.

# CHAPTER XLI

## THE UNINVITED SECOND

The last Count of Trigavou woke before daylight—slow coming in December—rose, dressed, and went to the clerk's office to pay his bill.

There he found Sir Harries Harrison, who intended to run up to Paris by the night train, and wished to employ the morning till the duelling-time in seeing the lions. He carried a pistol case containing a brace of the Bishop of Bond Street's sure-kills. His principal admired them, and was further delighted at the baronet going his way till they had to be together. Thus he could settle with Guevel, and explore the island alone.

So the Englishman departed, after giving his hand a squeeze that made the marrow ache.

At nine o'clock he went leisurely to Good Help Gate, and in twenty minutes more was on the walk from the gate to the beach. Accessible to foot-passengers when the sea is out, the Big Bey becomes an island at other times, only attainable by boats. The tide was running in when Trigavou started, but it was just after the turn and the edge barely lapped the flagged crown of the submergeable dyke.

It was dark and cold, but the wind, though northerly, blew less heavily.

He was before time, and could not see Captain Guevel at the foot of the hillock where they ought to have joined. He did not care to wait for him, so he ventured on the still unflooded *levée*, not long to remain so, and safely passed over the slippery stones to the rough stairs hewn in the stony side of the Big Bey. Afar on his left, at the end of a strip of road, another dam emerged to unite the two Beys and to serve as landing stage for the Dinard boats when there is not enough water for them to enter the foreport. Thence would come the *Gullwing's* boat.

Before climbing upon the island, the count looked up and saw the veteran pilot at the top of the stairs about coming down. He waved him back and hastened to ascend to him.

"Well?" he interrogated.

"Well," Guevel made answer, "there's the yacht under steam, as I promised your lordship. Very proper of the skipper not trying to anchor. The sea is still rough, and the fitful wind may rouse up again. I advise ye not to dawdle on the island, but get off in the lull. The *Gullwing's* boat will run into land at eleven, a-lee of the Little Bey. The master has made out my signals and answered them."

"Do me the pleasure of coming to the point with me and showing me your boat."

"Willingly. I don't want to be cooped up here by the tide, but I have time enough."

Trigavou followed old Guevel, who conducted him along the old fort walls to the cliffs facing the open sea. Some thousand odd feet out, the *Gullwing* was gambolling with her nose in and out of the surge, towing after her a little boat that was dancing furiously.

"How did you manage to communicate with your captain at such a distance?" inquired Trigavou.

Guevel showed a roll under his arm composed of different coloured flags wrapped round a stick.

"In the navy," said he, "there's a code that enables us to correspond just as you land-goers use the telegraph. Your lady knows now that you are here, and that you will be aboard before midday. Want to see her?" inquired the old sea-dog, pulling a stumpy telescope out of his pocket. "Take that and pull it out till you get the focus correct. It's not so pretty to look at as your opera-glasses, but it brings 'em nearer."

Count Trigavou set the instrument properly, and clearly discerned, leaning on the taffrail of the yacht, a woman in black, whom he had no trouble to recognise as Lady Houlbecq. It seemed to him she waved a handkerchief.

"Thanks, captain," he said, "you have relieved me. Now, let us go aside to settle our little account."

He took the pilot into the bottom of a dip of land where no one on the yacht could see them, and handed him three rolls of gold, a thousand francs each, which the other pocketed unceremoniously, saying:

"Thank 'ee, my lord. I'm at your service any time. Just now you'll not need me, and it's high time I steered home'ard, for there's nigh six inches of water on the dam. But how about that 'ere Englishman you were going to bring along? He ain't come."

"He's coming."

"In a boat, then, for he cannot get over there without filling his shoes. Very well. If I run athwart him along the strand, I'll tell him you are waiting. Bless you, I shall know him without any description. Sing'ler thing how all the British look similar to the same model."

Remaining by himself, the count took to examining the fighting ground. There was an enclosure, surrounded by a dilapidated wall, with one opening landward. The visitor called the ruins a fort, but they might as probably be those of a barracks or arsenal; but anyway, that made no difference to him. There were all the requisites—space, equal lights, and assured isolation.

After this inspection, he met Sir Harries, who excused himself being full a quarter of an hour late, but he had found it hard to get a boat to breast the still tossing sea, and his cruise up the river had been rough. However, he had met no mishap, and the pistol-case had not been splashed, though his cockleshell had shipped some waves.

"I am in time," he observed, "since our adversary and his companions have not turned up, for I saw a six-oar barge behind my boat."

"The cutter's," interrupted Lord Trigavou, "with our party. Shall we go and meet them?"

"If you like. Only I wanted to see the poet's tomb."

"You shall. Chateaubriand rests close here."

He conducted the novelty-seeker to the headland wherein the illustrious native writer is buried, under a slab and granite cross. After some surprise at seeing no name or date, the Englishman could find no finer eulogium to make over the author of "Réné" than this:

"He was Ambassador to St. James's under our King George the Fourth!"

This made his hearer smile, but not forget that the moment of his peril approached, and he urged Sir Harries to hold out for the firing to be at will, the men placed at forty paces with power to advance each ten paces, and two shots a-piece if the first fire had no result.

"Do you not fear the repeated shots will attract interferers?" queried the baronet.

"Oh no; there's nobody on the island, and now the sea is up only boats can come."

"Excuse me; the crossing on foot is still practicable, for as I climbed the stairs I saw a woman on the dam—wading, it is true, rather than walking, but she could get along."

"A woman?—some shrimper, I suppose."

"No; a lady, I ought to have said, for her hat and dress were stylish. She was in mourning too, or at least in complete black."

Trigavou started, wondering if this could be Lady Houlbecq, who had spied him from afar. But it was absurd. To begin with, the baroness, whom he had seen on the yacht, had not time to be put ashore; and, even could that miracle of speed be accomplished, she would have had no necessity of wading along the flooded Neck to reach the island; the boat would have set her ashore under the rocks.

"Strange!" he muttered. "You say she was not a fish-girl?"

"Not by her dress."

"Young?"

"I should think so, by her bearing. Her face was veiled to the teeth. But we might go and question her on her business here."

"Yes, come along," said the Count.

They re-ascended the rising ground overtopping the tomb, but were scarcely there before Sir Harries cried out:

"Here's our party!"

They were not twenty paces off.

"Let us rather go meet them," said Trigavou.

They were three in number: Derquy, Allanic, and Dr. Avangour, whom the count was vexed to recognise. He guessed how he had been brought to the spot, and he wished so well-informed a witness had failed to come. But he could not protest, and made no comment. All saluted with frigid politeness, according to habit.

"Gentlemen," said the gunboat commander, "I believe we are agreed on the terms. But I must remind you that my boat which landed us is ready to take us off. You can all use it."

"I have my own boat," replied the Englishman. "You might see it as you came in-shore."

"Let us lose no time," interjected Alain. "This is the enclosed spot I alluded to. It will take some time to measure the distances and settle every point."

They were all in haste to have done. They disappeared behind the dwarf wall surrounding the field, whence one of the twain ought not to walk forth alive.

At this very moment the young lady whom Sir Harries had seen on the dam leaped on the Big Bey Island strand. She had experienced much trouble to cross, and she sprang behind the boulders instead of running up the stairs. She had seen the boat land Derquy and his two friends, and she hid, not to be perceived by them in passing. This intrepid person who had risked being drowned to reach the Big Bey could be no other than Viviana de Bourbriac.

She was at Dinan beside Dr. Avangour when the lieutenant's telegram arrived, and she had so implored that it was shown her. It told her that the physician was expected over at St. Malo by the officer who was going to fight with the master of La Hunaudaie.

Viviana fully understood, but she made no remark, and the doctor left her in the evening, convinced she was resigned to await his return. But, after being up all night, the lady took the 5 a.m. train, and got in at St. Malo at 6.45. All travellers at hotels were slumbering, but she found by a porter that the two gentlemen arrived overnight at the Universe Hotel had just gone out. She followed them in a night-cab over the new bridge to St. Servan, where they embarked in a yawl to the gunboat on the station there.

Viviana, knowing that Olivier had gone to meet a naval collegian of his acquaintance, divined that this M. Allanic was to be his second, and she remained in the cab till the boat left the cutter with its passengers for the City Fort. Then she was rapidly driven to the swing-bridge. Then, dismissing the vehicle, she crossed to St. Malo quay, and ran upon the mole. With wind and water against it, the cutter's boat did not make much way, and the watcher could easily be sure the Big Bey was its destination. She naturally concluded that would be the duelling-ground, the other Bey being fully occupied by a fort armed and tenanted.

She reasoned that she might arrive before the boat. Her heart continued to goad her. She had come away because she would have died of anxiety at Dinan. She wished to be near Olivier when he fought, and see him, alive or dead. Yet she felt that she could not stop the combat, and she had too much good sense to play the part of the stage heroine, who rushes in between duellists to "bring down the curtain on an effective picture."

She climbed the stairs some time after the others, and on seeing the old walls comprehended they enclosed the field of honour. The party must have entered it already, for there was not a soul on the parched islet, over which she domineered entirely. She advanced to the headland, a little behind Chateaubriand's tomb, and only a few steps from the duelling-ground.

She divined that the preliminaries of the action would take some time, and knew that the survivor must come forth under her eyes. She had the courage to keep her place till fate decided.

Pale and motionless, she listened, puzzled what kind of weapons would be used. At that distance she would not hear the clash of swords, and, with the present breeze, she might not hear the report of pistols. Still, there she knelt, paralysed with anguish.

The sea was now beating on the island rocks, and the spray of its breaking rollers flew at whiles upon her without her heeding it.

The prolonged, shrill sound of a steam whistle made her start. Turning her head, she saw a tiny steamer about a mile away approaching. What was it steering so for; and was the whistle a signal—and to whom addressed? Almost instantly a little boat was let go from the yacht's stern, and headed for the island. Four men rowed it vigorously; and in the stern sheets, a fifth person, hooded and wrapped in waterproof, sat by the tiller, but did not handle it.

Viviana wondered why they should lay their course hither; not to take in water or vegetables, for there were no such articles on the barren rock. The figure at the helm attracted her attention most. Instead of steering, it used both hands to hold a large marine glass up to its eyes, and direct it upon the spot where Viviana stood. If a good glass, it might make out her features, though the lady could not yet discern those of the gazer.

The space between rapidly lessened from the sturdy seamen coming on with the rising tide. They soon turned off to the right, so as to land, not under the cliff where the shore was inaccessible, but at a distance where a goats' path came down. All at once the unknown threw back the hood, and showed her bare head. Viviana uttered a scream, she recognised her sister.

It was Flavia indeed, blanched, dishevelled. On her part she had long since recognised the other, for she rose to her feet and waved her hand as if to bid her begone. With her tall stature and her long black hair floating on the wind, she seemed the spirit of the storm, cursing the world where men dwelt and commanding the ocean to rise and engulf it.

"'Tis she," murmured Viviana. "Now I see it all. She awaits her accomplice that they may flee together. Forced to fight with Olivier, he required the meeting to be here. He believes he will surely kill my darling and can rejoin the wretched woman whose husband he also murdered. Villain! and she is another! To think I still pitied her! prayed Heaven to spare her shame and punishment! hoped she would redeem her crime by repentance. All is over now—I have only to try to forget her."

Lady Houlbecq could not hear this monologue, but she saw that Viviana seemed to take root on the rock, and she said to herself:

"It is fated she should bear me bad luck. She robbed me of my fortune, she tried to rob me of my lover, and here she is, watching to prevent him coming away with me. She must have bribed the old pilot into betraying the secret of his embarking from the Big Bey. Who knows if she has not set the police on his track, to avenge herself? That is what posts her there. But where is he? This very morning Guevel signalled his yacht-master to send the boat off at eleven. That means that Alain has come here, I am sure. Perhaps he has seen Viviana, and is hiding till she's gone. I would do wrong to land while she is there. I ought to wait till he shows himself. But if I see him nothing shall stop me. I have come for him, and when we are aboard the yacht we shall baffle our foes. I am glad I went aboard among the sailors; without me they would not have known what to do. I must give them orders to keep off till Alain appears."

Thereupon, Viviana, who let none of her sister's movements escape her, saw her take her seat again and quickly speak to the little crew, who hastened to execute her command. The boat changed its course; instead of heading in-shore it stood off till about halfway to the *Gullwing*, where they laid on their oars or only dipped them in now and again to resist the current.

"She still hopes he will come," thought Mdlle. de Bourbriac. "Does she know they are engaged in single combat? No. If she knew that she would also know that Olivier has seconds with him, so that, even if he were to fall, they would not let the general's murderer escape under their very eyes."

Reminded of the deadly encounter, she forgot about her sister, and strove to divine what was taking place beyond the enclosed walls. She was astonished it had not come to an end by this. She knew a quarter of an hour was long for the crossing of swords, as the general, an expert swordsman, had often told the story of his duels. But she knew also that the arrangements take time, and that good fencers stop to rest. Yet everything has an end, and she waited till twenty minutes were gone by.

It did not occur to her that pistols had been selected and that there had been a discussion on Trigavou's claim, per Sir Harries, for firing at will. Allanic, dubious on his friend's marksmanship, had proposed simultaneous firing at thirty paces and at the word of command. The doctor was for the least dangerous mode, but then he had no voice in the matter. Olivier cut the knot by giving way to his antagonist on all points. Then came the examination of the pistols, and, they being equal enough, the decision that the four shots must suffice.

Ignorant of all this, Mdlle. de Bourbriac was beginning to believe the affair would not come off when she heard a single shot. One of the men, not replying, must have been killed or severely hurt. She still paused to hear the return shot, feeling forewarned that Count Trigavou had fired the first.

But after a minute she ran towards the entrance of the fort. She almost ran against Count Trigavou coming out and passing her by, though he could have recognised her, for her veil was up.

Whither was he speeding ?

She never thought to ask him, for she had spied in the enclosure three men kneeling around one extended on the soil—one of the former she knew to be Dr. Avangour. They were all turned from her and so surrounded Olivier that she could not tell his state ; wounded or dead ? she feared the latter, and bewildered, dashed away not to see the dead body of her lover.

His slayer had not time to go very far. He walked along the cliff edge in order to reach the dizzy path to the beach. Viviana now saw him pause and look seaward, shading his eyes with his hand against the wan sunbeams piercing the storm-clouds.

The *Gullwing's* boat was well away, but Alain descried it and began to beckon to it. Lady Houlbecq did not see this, for her crew kept dipping in the oar to hold the boat to the same place.

" He will yet be seen and she will bear him hence," argued Viviana. " They will peacefully enjoy their guilty bliss ;

and there will be no punishment on the villain who laid Olivier dead on that blood-smeared sward."

She darted towards the count, not to grasp him, but to denounce him and curse him.

In passing her, he thought she was hastening to throw herself on her sweetheart's breast, and he had not seen her approach, engrossed as he was in calling the boat. At length Flavia had recognised her accomplice, and she bade the oarsmen return to the island.

"Murderer!" screamed Viviana.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE LAST EMBRACE

The count, turning abruptly, lost colour, on seeing himself cornered. Yet he tried to show a bold face, and to shake off his accuser by affecting to sympathise with her in her distress.

"I am sorry," he said in a grave, contrite voice. "It was not in my power to avoid this fatal encounter—and I am eager to quit this spot where it's my misfortune to wound an old friend mortally."

"Rather say you are eager to rejoin the woman you beguiled to her ruin," retorted Mdlle. de Bourbriac. "But no, you shall not go. Let her flee if she will, for I wish never to see her! I shall try to forget her, but it's another matter as regards you. I will not allow you to find impunity elsewhere. You belong to justice."

"You forget that Lieut. Derquy is dying, and that your place is beside him at such a critical moment. Pray let me pass, and haste to him."

"No! let her come, the wretch who expects you! I wish to see her. She knows I am here for she recognised me. Let her land that I may show her the dead body of poor Olivier. 'Twas you who slew him, but she guided your arm."

Maddened with grief, she was no longer the patient maiden but the avenger of guilt. She stood and barred Trigavou's flight, and for a moment he was tempted to end all by hurling her over the cliff.

From her boat, no longer far from the Bey, Flavia distinctly saw this scene, which she interpreted contrarily to truth. Her first view of her sister on the headland had perplexed her. She imagined now that her lover was compacting with Vivette to go with her. She had no idea he had been fighting a duel, and she believed they were acting a farce with the design to disgust her into departure.

Presently she saw them vanish. Count Trigavou, bent on finishing with this drag, had stepped back from the edge and Vivette had followed him close. They were screened by a natural ridge. The baroness conjectured they had taken flight together and wild rage swayed her.

"What! Would you be the mate of a murderer?" she screamed, as if her sister could hear her.

She commanded the astonished sailors to leave the shore waters once more.

"Back to the yacht!" she cried. "Ten thousand francs among the crew if I am in England to-morrow."

The men needed no further inducement for them to row away for the *Gullwing*; the four pairs of arms made the yawl skim the waves, so it would not be long in reaching the steamer.

Meanwhile Trigavou had chosen the simplest course; he took to his heels. The lady had no strength to overtake him, allowing she would pursue.

And he knew where the path began, shallowly traced on the rocky side, the downway (*devalée*), as the old natives term it. So he darted away. Mdlle. de Bourbriac would in most likelihood have started after him, but just then, on the other side of the island, she saw soldiers appear and gun-barrels gleam. This small squad was mounting the stairs opposite Good Help Gate.

Trigavou saw them as well, and perhaps took them for gendarmes, though in artillerist uniform. He swerved to the right to near the headland, which he skirted to where it bulged out. But there, after a brief stay, he dropped suddenly.

Had he missed his footing and fallen into the void?

Vivette hastened to bend over the edge, but saw nothing at the first. Then the splash of a body in the water made her start.

Trigavou had found the path and leaped down on it, but when twenty feet from the strand the spray-wetted soil gave way abruptly. From that height the fall would have been fatal, but the tide was high and the rocks overhung it. The depth of the sea into which he was plunged deadened the shock, rough enough, however. He came up to the surface stunned, flung his hands about bewildered, till, coming to his senses, he struck out like a man for the small boat.

It was already far, and Flavia, in the stern, could not see her lover expending his energy in vainly attempting to overtake it. Against him were wind, currents, and the weight of his garments. The oarsmen, of course seated contrariwise to the baroness, saw him plainly, but they did not understand much of what was going on upon the island or in the sea where the stranger was struggling desperately with death. They were not sorry, either, to have their share of the round sum promised by the lady passenger and that quieted their consciences. They continued rowing without making any remark, and the space between them and the yacht visibly lessened.

"He is lost!" muttered Vivette, who had a perfect view of this agony from the bluff.

She pitied the helpless man now: whom she had pursued to curse she wished to save. She would have lent him a hand if that could be.

A shriek overcame the thunder of the rollers, a heartrending call that the north wind flung into Vivette's ears, but away from Flavia's. The last of the Trigavous appealed to the woman by her name, for whom he had shot General Houlbecq, and she did not hear it. But he succeeded in touching the heart of one of the seamen. He let the baroness know, who perceived her beloved and instantly ordered a return.

Now she was sure of him, for she saw Vivette on the brink. At length she comprehended her blunder, and that, instead of betraying her so dear, he had leaped into the sea to escape the younger sister. And the boat that he relied on finding under the cliff was no longer there to receive him by Flavia's own fatal order, which doomed her darling to an almost certain death.

"My whole fortune to you if you save him!" she cried to the sailors, who asked nothing better than to gain the reward for they credited the noble lady with being very rich.

They soon brought the yawl round towards the Big Bey, and in less than five minutes had regained the distance lost by obeying their passenger.

Trigavou was still swimming, but almost worn out. He made no progress and he got lower and lower in the water. Waves that he had easily ridden upon at the outset broke over his head. Now and again he went out of sight altogether and only came up to go under anew.

But the boat was hastening on.

Lady Houlbecq, standing up, encouraged the men with voice and gesture, bending at their oars. One pull more and they would reach the swimmer; they had to shoot by alongside him so that one man, shipping his oar, could clutch him by the collar.

"Pull, port; steady, starboard," said the bow oarsman, making ready for the act.

The count, to facilitate it, trod water and managed to shoot his shoulders well out. Unfortunately, the baroness leaned forward, which would have capsized a crankier craft, and spoilt the whole; she did it to seize the count's hand, but it brought that side down, and when the men threw themselves to the other direction to right the boat, it was out of Alain's reach, though he tried to catch it. He fell backwards, and as he went down hissed at Flavia:

"You're the cause of my death, curse you!"

But already the men had brought the yawl round and were pulling for the sinking man. This time they managed to touch him even as he went down for the last time. The baroness, kneeling against the gunwale, extended her arms and succeeded in grasping him. But at the contact of the fingers with his head he sprung up with a superhuman effort clutched her by the neck and dragged her over down into the sea, gasping with his mouth full of water:

"You have your wish at last. We shall never be parted more."

Alone, she was so good a swimmer that she might have saved herself, but the clenching fingers of her lover compressed her throat. In vain she endeavoured to free herself. He would not loosen his grip and she vanished from view with him. The sea closed over them and the long swell of the great breakers rolled the boat aside.

The two interclasped bodies settled down in the black profundity.

"O God! have mercy on them!" burst from Vivette, as in awful terror she hid her face in her hands.

She turned to flee, but a man was in her way whom she had not heard draw near. He bowed to her and said:

"Something seems wrong, madam! An hour ago I saw you crossing the dam. I am looking for——"

"The Count of Trigavou," cried Mdlle. de Bourbriac. "You were his second! what has befallen his adversary?—not dead, not dead!"

"No doubt you are speaking of the naval lieutenant," asked the new-comer, tranquilly.

Viviana had never seen him before; it was Sir Harries Harrison.

"Yes, yes—well?"

"He has a bullet in his chest—a serious wound, but he is still living, and since you are interested in him, I am happy to tell you his medical man in attendance does not despair of pulling him through."

Mdlle. de Bourbriac was starting, when the baronet detained her, saying:

"I see you are fond of him, and no doubt he does not expect you here. Have a care, madam!—a sudden shock may be his death."

Viviana stopped short, at whatever pain it cost her.

"The Earl of Trigavou was so cut up by the sad result that he had gone without me. May I inquire if you met him? My task is over, and I can go back to St. Malo with him."

The lady pointed to the open sea, but, as he did not understand, she added:

"There he is. God has punished him."

"Do you mean to say he is drowned?" ejaculated the Englishman. "Bless my soul! how? he had no business that way to get to Good Help Gate."

Suffocated by emotion, the other answered him not. She was looking at the yacht. The boat was being hauled up under its stern, and the vessel headed for the port. The voyage was paid for, but there were no passengers for Ireland. Then Viviana ran to the old fort, determined at any hazard to see Olivier, or to question Dr. Avangour, if her approach was forbidden.

"How d'e do, my lord," cried a voice.

The Englishman looked around. It was Colonel de Sacey, the artillerist, who breakfasted with him at the Franklin Hotel and had excused himself from participating in the duel. Six gunners whom he had brought, stood at a respectful distance. Trigavou may have seen this party, and that had spurred him into a fleeter retreat. Sir Harries extended his hand to Lord de Sacey and expressed his pleasure in seeing him again.

"Who's that lady?" queried the officer, looking after her.

"M. Derquy's sister, or a nearer one yet and a dearer one, as the poet says," answered Sir Harries. "I do not know much more than yourself on that head. I met her here and she wanted to know how the duel resulted. I told her, bad for the gentleman she was interested in."

"The duel, eh? so they had a fight—whereabouts?"

"Yonder, behind that wall—an excellent place."

"There ought to have been a sentry here. Somebody will catch it, for the inspector-general is at hand. He sent me on ahead from the Little Bey. Is this the upshot of the quarrel those gentlemen had at the Franklin?"

"Yes. I stayed, and have been second to Earl Trigavou."

"What for?"

"On account of some woman. I pressed him no further. In such cases a still tongue shows a wise head, don't you know."

"I do not dispute that. But do you know what this nobleman has done? You heard the table-talk?"

"Rather; about a trial at St. Brieuc. We all disapproved the chatter."

"Trigavou had private reasons to shut that up. The juror accused of having assassinated old General Houlbecq was Lord Trigavou himself—the same man whose second you have been."

The Englishman started, but, quickly recovering, he replied coolly, instead of admitting he was wrong:

"As long as he is not guilty, what matter how much he was accused of?"

"I do not say he is, but a police officer came to the Franklin with a high court warrant for him."

"Whew!" whistled the baronet.

"For murder aforethought. He could not find Lord Trigavou, but he took up the hunt for him, and he is bound to run him down."

"That young lady told me he jumped into the sea, and she gave me to understand he was drowned."

"A blessed relief for him, and for you. I can hardly believe this. You would have seen him throw himself into the sea, whether to escape or to commit suicide."

"No; I was with the wounded man. It seemed to me quite natural that Lord Trigavou should step out of it after the fight, which was fair, I tell you. The two men were to fire at will, advancing. The earl fired first, and brought down the lieutenant. His second, his doctor, and I sprang to him, but Lord Trigavou had no further business there. I thought he was gone to the other end of the island to wait for me. I was looking for him when I met that lady."

"I begin to understand matters," muttered Colonel de Sacey.

"What's your opinion, now?"

"That the count got drowned in trying to swim aboard that little craft yonder—a well-known pleasure boat, let out to visitors for long cruises or short ones. It may have been engaged to take him hence to England. Perhaps he took my guard for gendarmes; with a muddy conscience one does not see clearly. Drowned, eh? A good riddance! Had the police secured him he would only have ended his days in a penal settlement."

This funeral oration displeased Sir Harries, strongly regretting his assistance to a criminal, and he took the colonel's advice to leave in the latter's boat before the affair got wind.

They went to offer transport also to the wounded man. They found him lying down, partly upheld by his friend Allanic. Viviana, kneeling, pressed one of his hands in both of hers. Dr. Avangour had just extracted a bullet.

"Lodged in the collar-bone without breaking it," he said. Olivier looked at him questioningly, and he added: "You will be on your legs again in three months, and can marry in another quarter if you like."

# EPILOGUE

The physician's prediction was only partially realised. Olivier Derquy was convalescent in a fortnight, but he did not marry for six months to come, as Viviana wished to be out of mourning, and to welcome the innocent into liberty. When Justice blunders she does not willingly own her fault. The warrant had not produced Alain, for he was dead this time beyond doubt.

The sea had cast upon Paramey beach the corpses of the loving twain. From that tragic end their guilt could be concluded. This assumption required support in Pillemer's confession. This was not easy, as he knew the penalty for perjury. He hoped to get clear by asserting that his master, not present to gainsay him, had dictated his evidence. Finally, he confessed he had not left his farm on the day of the crime, and had not, consequently, seen Calorguen with or without his gun.

So "no charge" was recorded, and the unfortunate gamekeeper was set at liberty; he and Yvon, freed the same day, returned to Trigavou, where Derquy and Vivette awaited them. The old mother still lived and greeted her son.

Mdlle. de Bourbriac wished her wedding to be in Trigavou church. Dr. Avangour and Justice Miniac gave her away. Olivier Derquy had chosen as his best man his college mate, Allanic, and, after consulting Vivette, Pierre Calorguen also, though but a gamekeeper, who, however, well deserved this public reinstatement. The justice who had ordered the arrest signed the register, to the general delight. Now, Carlorguen is steward of Trigavou.

Pillemer was let off lightly with only five years, but he did not return to Brittany when his time was up. The peasants would have pelted him, and Commander Jugon threatened to horsewhip the hide off him.

Vivette entered into enjoyment of the general's fortune. Under the law she also inherited her sister's property, but she turned it all over to the poor around Dinan and in it; she had offered it to Calorguen, but he refused it; the baroness's money would have burnt his hands.

Vivette undertook to make Yvon a man and a soldier, and he was sent to a school to be prepared for the military academy.

After having repaired injustice and rewarded devotion, Madame Derquy had the right to enjoy a happiness dearly purchased. She and her husband went on the Italian tour and wintered in Naples. They returned in the spring.

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